

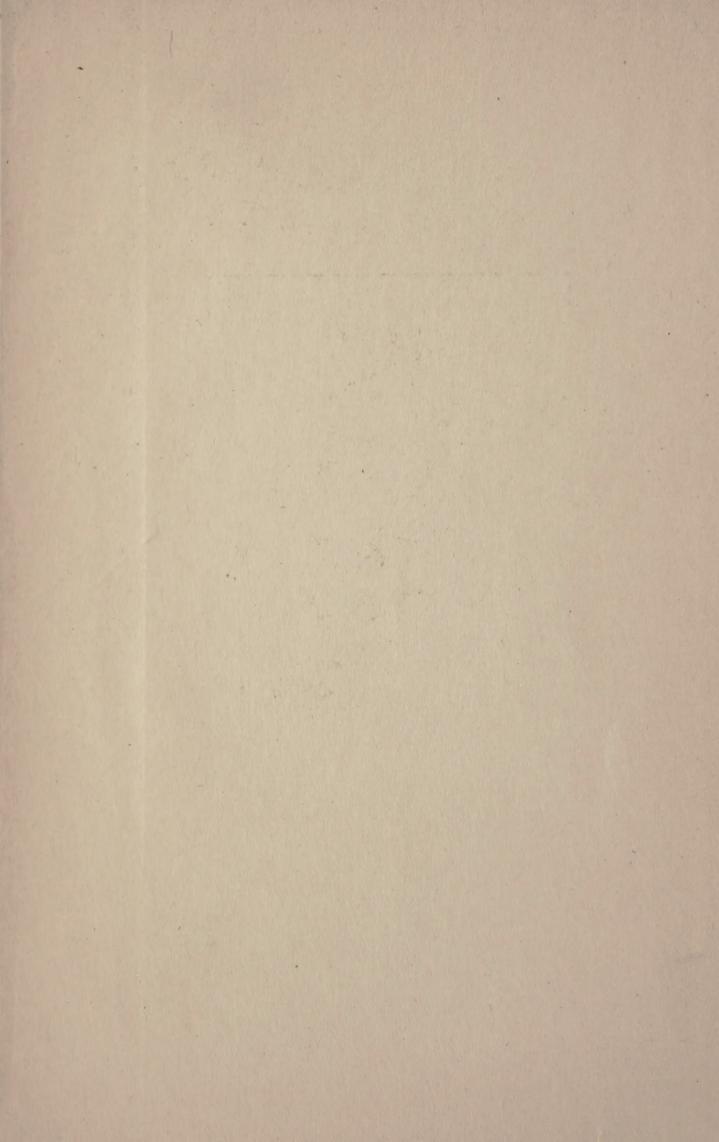


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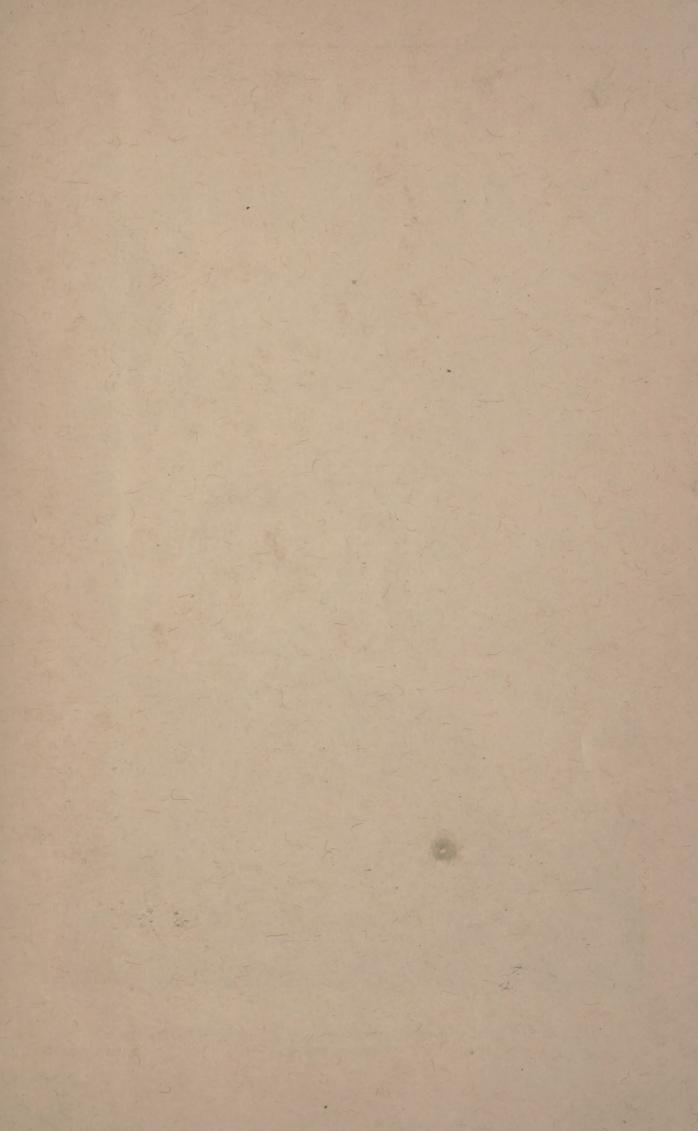
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HIS LEGS WERE COVERED, ALMOST UP TO THE KNEES, BY A LARGE ROCK

ALBERT W. TOLMAN

Author of "
"JIM SPURLING, FISHERMAN"

With Illustrations by BERT N. SALG



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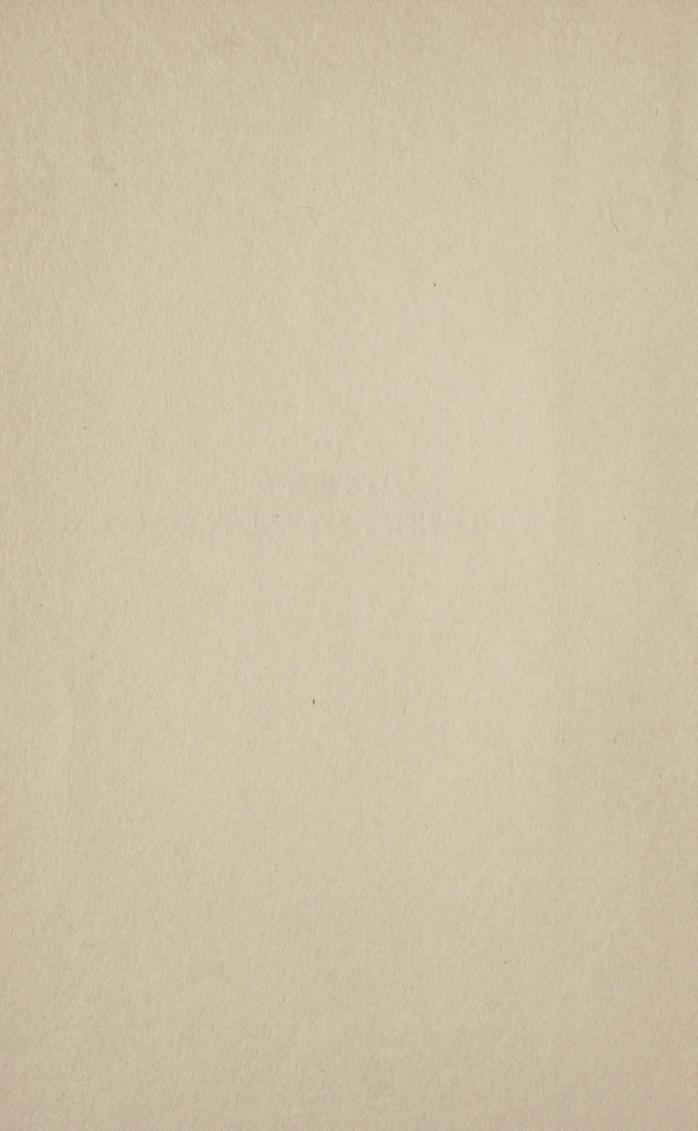
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JIM SPURLING, MILLMAN

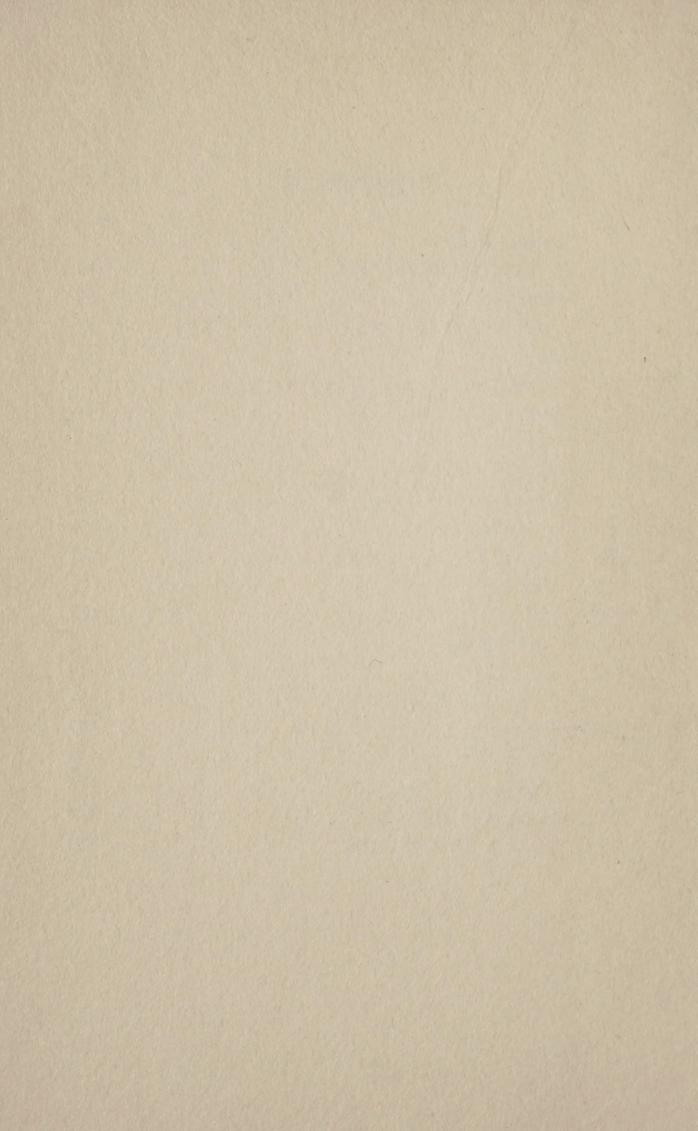
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# TO MY FRIEND WILLIAM PITT FESSENDEN ROBIE



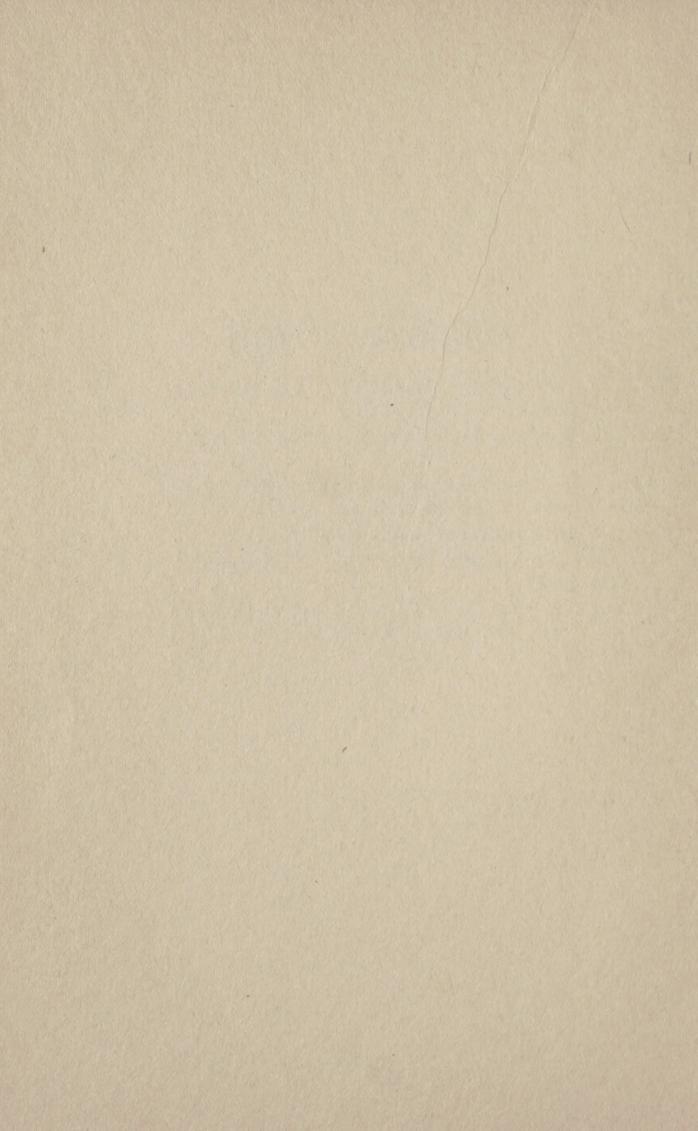
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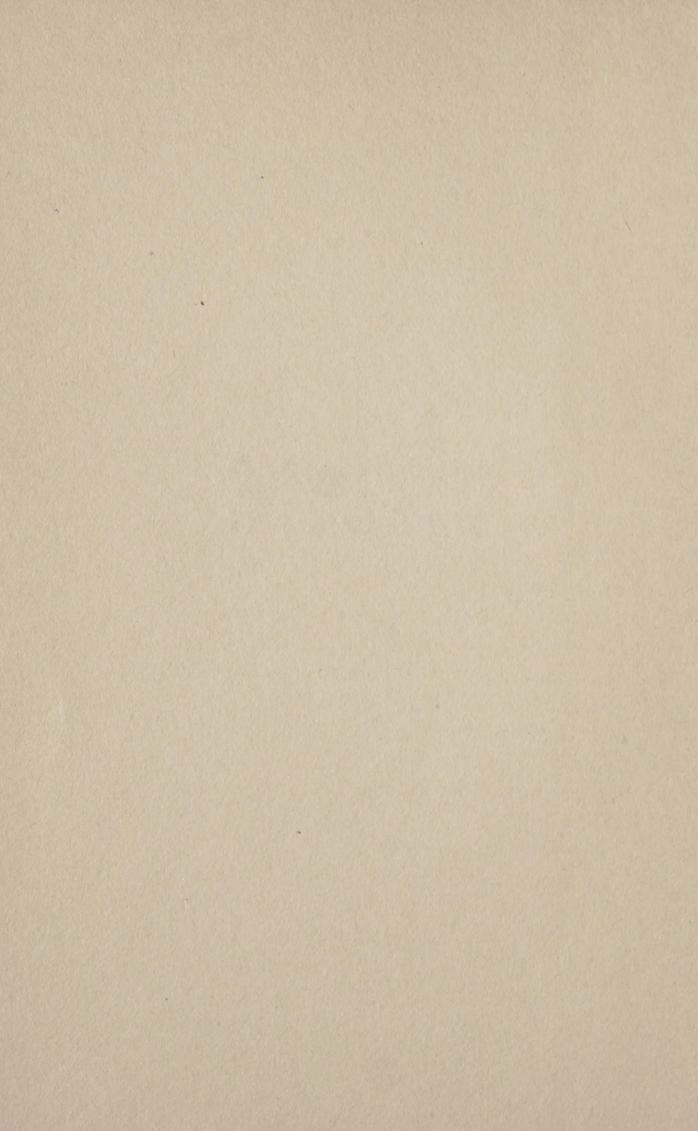
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I

#### PLAN AND PLOT

JIM SPURLING had one weakness. The big 'varsity catcher was obsessed with the hallucination that he could play the flute. So on a warm June afternoon the melancholy notes of "The Last Rose of Summer" floated out from the third story of North Hall over the Warburton College campus.

Oo-oo-ooh . . .

The mournful strains fell dismally on the ears of Ralph Cartledge, a peppery little Sophomore, who was passing under North, carrying a paper bag of bananas.

Oo-oo-ooh . . .

Sophomore blood had not yet turned to ditch water. Cartledge halted and raised a yell.

"Choke that off, you Freshman! Oh, choke that off!"

Extracting from the bag a particularly mellow banana, he sent it hurtling through the open window. It barely missed the musician's nose and spatted against the opposite wall, close to the head of Jim's roommate, Percy Whittington, who was just entering, flushed from tennis.

Jim removed the flute from his mouth and leaned

out over the sill.

"Did you want me, Cartledge?" he inquired,

pleasantly. "I'll be right down."

Cartledge decamped hastily with the rest of his bananas. He weighed fifty pounds less than the catcher, and was built accordingly. Jim resumed his painstaking practice.

00-00-00-00h . . .

Percy could stand it no longer.

"For Heaven's sake, Jim!" he exploded, "give us anything but that 'Hark-from-the-tombs' stuff. There ought to be a law against it. I don't blame Cartledge for throwing that banana. I'd have thrown something worse if they didn't come so high a dozen."

Jim grew red. The flute was his tender point.

"I'm sorry my barbaric mouthing grates on your fine Italian ear, Percy," he observed, rather stiffly. "I didn't realize your musical taste was so fastidious."

"I'm not bragging on my Italian ear," retorted Percy. "It isn't so much the flute I object to, as it is the kind of stuff you play. Take that last thing!

It's the tune the old cow died of. They used it as an extreme torture in the days of the Spanish Inquisition. Why don't you give us 'The Campbells Are Coming,' or 'Johnny Cope,' or 'Garry Owen'? It wouldn't cost any more, and it might ease the last moments of your victims."

Jim looked provoked, then laughed.

"All right, Perce! I'll put away the instrument of torture for to-day. But mark me! I'm going to learn to play the flute. When I start anything I always intend to see it through."

Percy sighed resignedly. He knew Spurling's

tenacity.

"If you feel that way about it, Jim, I put up my hands. There's no hope for the rest of us, or the flute, either. Guess I'll take on the ukulele! I've got to protect myself somehow."

He glanced out over the campus.

"Here's Budge!" he shouted. "Back from his week's trip home. Oh, Budge! Come on up!"

Roger Lane presently opened the door. Dropping

his suitcase, he mopped his forehead.

"Whew! That grip must weigh about a ton. Those three flights haven't grown any shorter since I've been away. How's everybody and everything?"

He shook hands with Percy and Jim.

"O. K., so far as heard from," rejoined Percy.

There was a moment of silence. Lane hesitated, while the others watched him keenly.

"Something on your mind, Budge?" inquired Jim. "Let's have it!"

"Boys," said Lane, earnestly, "you know we've been trying all the spring to decide what we'd do this summer? Well, I've found just the thing we want. How'd you like to work in a vest-pocket sawmill?"

"What's a vest-pocket sawmill?"

"A portable mill! One of the kind that's moved from place to place to saw lumber that can't be reached in any other way. There's hundreds of 'em scattered over northern New England, and they employ thousands of men. It's a healthy, outdoor life; and there'd be good money in it. We could clear up among us considerably more than we did on Tarpaulin last year, and not work any harder. Of course it'd be entirely different from the salt water, but I believe we'd all like it. A little quiet, perhaps, back there in the pine woods; but we'd probably be too busy to need much amusement. It ought to put us in fine shape every way to start Sophomore year. What d'you say?"

"Sounds well," returned Jim, "but I can see some objections."

"Fire away," invited Budge.

"In the first place, where's your mill? How do you know that we four greenhorns could get a chance in one and feel sure we could hold the job down all summer? If we didn't suit the man who hired us, he might let us go after the first week. What then?"

Budge smiled.

"He wouldn't let you go—at least, not so long as you behaved yourselves. I can vouch for that."

"How can you?"
"I'm the man!"

Jim and Percy stared at him in amazement.

"Sure thing!" asseverated Budge. "Now listen! A year ago my father's cousin, Maria Peavey of Barham, back in Madison County, died after a long illness. She owned one of the finest lots of white pine left in the state of Maine. Lumbermen down that way have been making sheep's eyes at it for years, but she wouldn't allow an ax or a saw to touch it. All her heirs were cousins living outside the state. A few months ago they got together and decided that the lot had better be cut over right away. There's one trouble with standing timber-if a fire gets into it, it's gone. And they had a bad scare about that pine last August. So father came down from New Hampshire in April to look the ground over. A man named Legore offered to buy the trees on the stump; but the deal didn't go through, for he wanted both ends and the middle of the bargain. So father leased a second-hand, portable mill, had it set up on the lot, and arranged with Oramel Cardon to saw the lumber. But Cardon backed out before he'd fairly started. Father made another trip to Barham, and entered into a new agreement with Jethro Birkett. Two weeks ago a letter came saying that Birkett had thrown up the job, too. On top of that Legore

wrote, making a little better offer, but nowhere near what the lot is worth. Still, father was on the point of closing the deal, for he was too busy with his own affairs to put any more time on the Barham property. Just then I got home and learned what was up. I saw our chance in a second. I'd rather have waited till we could have threshed the thing out together; but it had to be decided right off. I knew we couldn't go to Tarpaulin this season, for your uncle Tom's fishing there himself. So I had father turn down Legore and told him we'd tackle the proposition. How does that hit you, Jim?"

There was a deep pucker in Jim's brow.

"Doesn't look very good to me," he said at last.

"Why not?"

"Who of us four knows anything about lumber?"

"I do. My father's owned a portable mill for years, and I've worked round one off and on ever since I was twelve. We'd have to hire a sawyer and a marker; there are two experienced men at home who've promised to come with me. The rest of the crowd we can get on the ground. It hurts my modesty to say it, but I know the business from A to Z; and if we all take hold and pull together I'm sure we can make a big success this summer."

Jim's lips tightened, and he shook his head slowly.

"I don't like to upset your plans, but . . . nothing doing for me on the sawmill! I know fish and lobsters and the salt water; and I know enough to know that I don't know anything about wood,

except that it's useful to knock on occasionally and that some people's heads are made of it. The mill appeals to me just about as much as Tarpaulin did to Perce at the beginning of last summer. You'll have to count me out of that deal, Budge."

Lane's face showed his disappointment, but he

refused to acknowledge defeat.

"I'm not going to give you up yet, Jim. Sleep on it. You may feel different to-morrow."

"I'll think it over," conceded Jim; but his tone

was not encouraging.

Lane picked up his suitcase and started for the door.

"Well, I must be getting over to the room to see how Throppy's made out camping by his lonesome."

"Oh, by the way, Budge!" exclaimed Percy. "Doc Dalton asked me to tell you to drop in as soon as you got back."

"What does he want?" Lane did not appear

surprised.

"Don't know! He didn't say. Only he seemed pretty serious."

"I'll run over to his office now."

"I'm sorry to discourage Budge," said Jim to Percy, after Lane had gone out. "But it looks to me like a leap in the dark. I don't know any more about lumber than you did about fish last year. And that's saying something!"

For a half hour the two were busy over their

books.

"Here comes Budge again!" remarked Percy, suddenly. "Wonder what the trouble is. He's got a face a mile long!"

A minute later Lane entered their room. Percy had not exaggerated the concern displayed on his chum's features. He came to the point at once.

"Fellows, I've some bad news. It's about Throppy. You know that he's been working hard all winter in that old physical laboratory. I've seen for some time that he wasn't as well as he ought to be, so just before I went away I made him promise he'd let the doctor look him over. Dalton didn't give him much satisfaction; wanted to see me first. I've just had a good talk with him. Throppy's left lung is affected; and, unless the trouble is stopped now, it's liable to grow serious."

He paused. Jim and Percy glanced at each other soberly. The unwelcome tidings had put an effectual damper on their spirits. After a moment of silence, Roger spoke again.

"I'm glad to have the chance of talking this over with you, while Throppy isn't here. If we four are to stick together this summer, we must find a place that 'll be good for him. Of course we mustn't count on him for any hard work; he ought to do only as much as will help him to get well, and not a stitch more."

There was another interval of silence. Jim was the first to break it.

"One thing's sure," he acknowledged. "That

cuts out the coast. The fog and salt air'd never suit Throppy's lungs."

He sat thinking with knitted brow, while the others watched him breathlessly. Finally he looked toward Lane.

"Budge," he confessed, "I guess your scheme's a good one, after all."

It was the first time Jim had ever changed his mind so quickly; but in this case he had a strong reason.

"The dry pine air'd be just the thing for Throppy," responded Budge, eagerly. "I'm sure he'd be all right by fall."

"But what about an old webfoot like me?" continued Jim. "I'd be clumsy as a duck on land. Do you think I'd be worth my salt?"

"I'll risk you, Jim," said Roger. "How about you, Perce? Care to stack up with us this summer?"

"Sure!" affirmed Percy, promptly. "You couldn't drive me away from this bunch. If you can stand me, I can stand you."

"You'll have to be the man to swing this thing, Budge," said Jim. "It's going to take some money. How'll we raise it?"

"I can get J. P., senior, to back us for any amount we want," offered Percy. "He doesn't think much of my business head; but you and Budge certainly made a strike with him last summer."

"No, Perce," refused Lane. "Much obliged to you and J. P.; but we sink or swim without him in

this. I've figured everything all out. According to my estimates we can handle the proposition for considerably under five thousand dollars. My father owns a third of the lot; and he and the other owners'll go security for us to borrow what money we need. As soon as our first hundred thousand feet of boards are on the sticking ground, we'll sell 'em for cash, and begin to pay back what we owe. We needn't have too much in the air at any one time."

"What kind of a place is Barham?" inquired Jim.

"Father says it's just an ordinary country town among the mountains; it's in the little woods, not the big ones. There are scattered farms, and a small village with a crossroads store and post office, where everybody trades and gossips. Near the lot is a lake that 'd give us a chance to swim and fish after working hours. While we'd have to stick pretty close to business, we shouldn't intend to kill ourselves. But of course, if we take hold at all, we want to do the job up brown."

"Where could I fit in?" asked Jim, doubtfully. "When it comes to swinging an ax, I'm as green as

grass."

"A little practice 'll make you a top-notch roller; and I'll be pitman."

"What about me?" queried Percy.

"I thought you might do the firing. Think you could stand it, Perce, eh? The heir of all the Montmorencies getting his lily-white hands stuck full of splinters stoking a steam boiler?"

A dull red crept slowly up into the light hair behind Percy's ears.

"Once and for all, Budge, cut out the Montmorency stuff! I'm not to blame for my father's being a millionaire. You rubbed it into me hard enough last summer on Tarpaulin to last me all my life. I'm in earnest about this."

Lane looked at him a moment.

"All right, old man! I apologize. I won't do it again. Does that square things between us?"

"Sure!" accepted Percy, heartily.

They shook hands. Suddenly Jim made a warning gesture.

"'Sh-h!" he cautioned. "Here comes Throppy

up the main path!"

Stevens ascended the stairs, and entered the room rather languidly. His step dragged and his cheeks lacked the color natural to his age.

"Have a seat, Throppy," invited Jim with an animation that was a trifle forced. "The council fire is kindled and we're holding a powwow on our summer's work. Tell him about the snarl you're trying to tangle us up in, Budge!"

Lane went over his plan briefly, and Stevens listened without comment. He scanned their faces

as Roger finished.

"I'll go, if you want me, fellows," was all he said.

"Want you? Of course we do!" protested the others in chorus. "We couldn't get along without you and your violin."

"I'll bring my flute," offered Jim.

"Then that bars me out," ejaculated Percy.

"I've suffered enough."

"We want to go into this thing with our eyes wide open," resumed Budge. "If you fellows have any questions to ask or objections to make, now's the time for us to take 'em up."

They fell into long and serious talk.

At precisely that moment, seventy-five miles northeast of Warburton as the crow flies, another conference of an entirely different sort was taking place in a country law office.

In a dingy, low-ceilinged room, at a dusty table littered with papers, sat two men, talking earnestly. One was forty or thereabouts, thick-set, red faced and bull necked, with a strong jaw and prominent teeth, browbeating, forceful, filled to overflowing with the health that comes from life in the open; his name was H. Chesley Legore. The lawyer, Milo Grannitt, was of uncertain age, thin lipped and smooth shaven, with leathery features, cold, fishy, blue eyes, and scanty, straw-colored hair. His face bespoke him shrewd, unscrupulous, and merciless.

"Well, Milo," said the bull-necked man, "have

you heard the latest about the Peavey lot?"

The lawyer blinked his watery eyes. Scratching a match under the table, he lighted a half-smoked cigar.

"I've heard some talk," he ventured, conservative-

ly, "but I don't know whether it's the latest or not. Man named Lane handling the property, isn't there?"

"Yes. I tried to dicker with him about the lumber,

but we couldn't seem to come to terms."

"That's strange!" interjected Grannitt, drawing at his cigar.

Legore kept on, not heeding the other's sarcasm. "Then he patched up a deal with Oramel Cardon; but I soon made Oramel see which side of his bread was buttered; an' he was taken just sick enough to give him an excuse for pullin' out. Next, Lane tied up with Jethro Birkett; but some kind friend reminded Jethro of the mortgage I held on his son-in-law's farm, an' he quit, too. By that time I thought Lane might be ready to listen to reason, so I made him a mighty fair offer. Guess he'd have taken it, but just then his son came home from college an' tipped the kettle over. So Lane turned me down; an' this boy an' some of his college chums are comin' to Barham to pass a pleasant vacation strippin' the Peavey lot."

Milo, puffing away, eyes half closed, nodded under-

standingly. Legore was waxing indignant.

"Now I've never been to college, nor studied Greek or Latin. I haven't stepped inside a school-house since I was fourteen; an' I haven't read a book for five years. They call me 'Hard Cash' Legore, an' I'm not ashamed of the name. I may not know much of anything else, but I do know lumber. I can figger a stand of pine an' come within

a thousand feet of what it 'll saw out. There hasn't been a man but me run a mill in this township for ten years. Anybody who knows me an' how I feel, knows better than to try it. My lines take in just twenty-five square miles. There's Spring in Easton, an' Brown in Stowe an' Leadbetter in Parcherville an' Murray in Unity. I keep off their toes, an' they've learned to keep off mine."

Milo's lips curved quizzically round his cigar, but he did not interrupt the angry lumberman. Legore

was fast working himself into a temper.

"There isn't another lot like that in the state o' Maine. It's a pure stand o' white pine, tall an' sound an' straight an' han'some. I've had my eye on it ten years an' more, waitin' for Maria Peavey to die, so I could git it. An' if a passel of green young sports think they can jump in here an' snap it out from under my very nose, take the cream o' the cream, an' leave me the skim milk . . ."

He ground out an oath and slammed his fist down on the table. The pens and pencils rattled, and the dusty inkstand danced. Under his sparse brows Grannitt was watching him like a hawk.

"I don't see how you can stop 'em from jumping

in, Ches," he commented.

"That's just it. I don't intend to stop 'em. I'm goin' to let 'em jump in, an' then I'll jump on. I'm goin' to set back an' wait till all they've got an' more is tied up so tight they can't git it out; an' then I'll take a hand in the game. I'll teach 'em a

lesson they'll remember all their lives. Let 'em go ahead an' start in good shape! There'll be so much less for me to do when I take the thing over."

He drew a long breath.

"That'll be my principal business this summer, to knock those fellers out an' git hold o' that lot. So long as Mis' Peavey was alive my hands were tied; for the town wouldn't stand for my troublin' a widder. But now she's gone, nobody's got any interest protectin' strangers; so I'm goin' to cut loose an' do about as I please. Those boys'll have more different kinds o' world's grief than they've ever dreamed of. An' I won't have to lie awake nights thinkin' up ways to start it for 'em, neither. There's lots of it lyin' round loose, ready made. The powder's there; all it needs is somebody to strike a match, an' I've got a whole pocketful."

"Guess you can stir up trouble for 'em, if anybody

can, Ches."

"You bet I can! I'll skin 'em alive. They'll find the road from stump to stick a mighty rough one to travel. There's spikes in trees, an' saws breakin', an' horses fallin' lame, an' men gittin' so full o' hard cider they can't tell whether they're comin' or goin', an' fires, an' all sorts of accidents you might naterally expect would happen to a gang o' raw boys, as well as some you mightn't expect. Nice, quiet summer. Oh yes! I'll look out for that. Lively? I should say so! I'll guarantee things 'll happen so fast on the Peavey lot that those ducks'll get cricks in their

necks lookin' over their shoulders an' wonderin' what's goin' to hit 'em next."

He chuckled grimly.

"But won't old Hi Merrithew be crazier than ever, when he sees those pines goin' into boards! It'll make him realize what 'll happen to his own lot soon's he's through."

His veins swelled. His red face grew redder.

"Now, Milo, I need you an' you need me. The case's just this. Here's two or three thousand clean dollars comin' to somebody off that tract before the first of October. The question is who's to git it, you an' I, or those fresh young cubs o' strangers. You know me, Milo, an' I know you. There's no foolishness about us. We've summered an' wintered together a good many years, an' we've always stood shoulder to shoulder. There's many a deal we've handed out to the boys that's been pretty raw; but it's cooked 'em just the same. You've planned an' I've carried through. It's my business to git into trouble an' yours to git me out of it. I've never been in a scrape yet that you haven't been able to pull me through; an' we both know I've squeezed through some pretty slim knotholes. You're the smartest, slipperiest, trickiest lawyer in the whole state of Maine. That's why I hire you. I'd cheat you out of your last dollar, if I could, an' you'd do the same by me. That's business. The only difference between us an' some other people is that we have to talk plain to each other. Each of us knows so

much about the other that we don't dare to do any other way. I've sometimes wondered which of us two was the biggest scamp, honest I have, Milo! I wouldn't dare to die, leavin' you above ground, for fear of what you'd do to my estate. Between us, if we hadn't been tied up so tight in so many sink-or-swim deals, I wouldn't trust you for a minit. Either of us could put the other in state prison, but neither 'll ever do it, because, if one went, the other'd have to go, too. Well, let's come back to the Peavey lot!"

He leaned over the table.

"Mark me, Milo! When I start after anything, I always intend to git it. Now that's my lumber! I've law an' reason on my side; you're the law, an' the reason is I want it. Tell me just how far it'll be safe for me to go, an' I'll go that far an' then some. An' you'll git your slice. Is it a deal?"

Grannitt's cigar had burned out. He tossed it

into the waste basket and rose, yawning.

"Don't worry about me, Ches! Of course it's a deal. No need to start your pulse galloping over a little thing like that! Some day you're liable to snuff out with apoplexy. Sure I'm with you . . . to the hilt! I'm practicing law for the same reason that you're sawing lumber—to make money. And I don't care much how I do it, so long as I skip state prison, and get the money. I wouldn't say that outside, but it's true. And what's more, a good many others are doing the same thing; only they haven't the nerve

to acknowledge it. We'll give those youngsters a run for their dollars. The problem is to make 'em so sick of the lumber business that they'll wish they'd never seen a board and 'll throw the whole thing up in disgust. We've got the advantage of surprise. We're inside the breastworks. We know the ground and they don't. We can frighten 'em out, and not half try. Green fellows of that age haven't any sand. Well, let's call it a day and go to supper!"

Slamming the cracked door, he turned the key gratingly in the lock, and followed Legore along the dilapidated entry and down the creaking stairs.

A half hour afterward the conference in the college room at Warburton came to a close. The enterprise had been thoroughly canvassed and the sentiment in its favor was unanimous; but Percy felt that some further formality was necessary. Leaping upon his desk, he cupped his hand behind his ear.

"Do I hear any motion?" he shouted.

"I move we spend the next three months on the Peavey lot in Barham," proposed Lane.

"Second the motion," contributed Jim.

"All persons in favor manifest it in the usual manner," barked Percy. "Contrary minded. . . . The ayes have it!"

But if they had known of the colloquy just held in Grannitt's office, and what it would mean to them during the coming summer, the ayes might not have been so enthusiastic.

JUNE 12th found Jim, Budge, Throppy, and Percy on the train, bound for Barham. Their Sophomore examinations lay behind them and all had passed successfully. Under ordinary circumstances the trip would have been a hilarious one; but Throppy's poor health and the unfamiliar enterprise on which they were embarked had a sobering effect upon their minds.

With them were Otis Briggs and 'Gene Doggett, New Hampshire men from Lane's native town. Briggs was a sandy-complexioned, solidly built Yankee of about forty, with twinkling blue eyes and a humorous mouth overhung by a drooping yellow mustache; he talked and joked freely. His chum, Doggett, was in appearance and disposition almost his exact opposite—tall, lank, dark and taciturn. Each was an expert in his line, Briggs as sawyer, Doggett as marker.

"Wouldn't have dared to tackle this job if I hadn't been sure of getting Ote and 'Gene to come with us," confided Roger to Jim. "Ote's been sawing lumber ever since he was a boy. He can set up a

mill and make all kinds of repairs; and at a pinch he could jump in and fill the place of any man about the plant. 'Gene's almost as handy. The two of 'em make a team that's hard to beat. They'll teach us the business. I'm glad, on Throppy's account, we've got started early; he doesn't look any too good to me."

Stevens was sitting alone two seats in front of Budge and Jim. From his languid attitude it was easy to see that the ride was tiring him. Now and then he coughed slightly. Jim's face clouded.

"He'll feel better, after he's been outdoors awhile," he said; but his voice held a note of apprehension.

The conductor came along the aisle.

"Tickets!" he demanded, briskly.

The boys surrendered their pasteboards.

"I want a rebate," petitioned Percy.

The conductor stared at him.

"Why?"

Percy pointed to Jim.

"I'm thirty pounds lighter than he is. It doesn't cost the railroad near so much to haul me."

The man in blue coat and brass buttons passed on.

"If you classify yourself by your weight," he flung back, "you've taken the wrong train. You ought to have had yourself loaded on the freight. Tickets!"

"One on you, Perce," laughed Lane.

Percy touched his chest, giving the fencer's sign.

"Hit!" he acknowledged.

Their seventy-mile ride at last came to an end, and they disembarked at ten o'clock at the little country station of Edginton. They were the only passengers to alight. Their baggage was put off, and the train soon disappeared round a curve.

"Stage for Barham!"

The voice came from a short, gray-haired, bow-legged man in straw hat and linen duster.

"That means us!" said Budge.

The stage driver scrutinized them with a gimletlike gaze. He seemed to have been aware of their coming.

"My name's Zenas Strout," he volunteered. "So you're the fellows who're goin' to lumber on the Peavey lot, hey?"

A peculiar smile, almost a grin, wrinkled his lips, while he contemplated them with a long, curious, appraising stare, as if he were taking their measure and comparing them with some unseen personality.

"This way!" he directed, curtly.

Following him round the end of the station, the boys came upon a battered, nondescript vehicle, half coach and half buckboard, standing beside the platform; to it were harnessed a pair of stout, gray horses.

"That's the stage," said Zenas. "Ain't much on looks, but it's got two redeemin' features: it'll hold everythin' an' everybody you can pile onto it, an' there's always room for one more. Lend us a hand with your duffle!"

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They soon loaded on the baggage, including a crated, second-hand motor cycle which Budge, fore-seeing that it might be useful, had bought at a low figure. Everybody clambered aboard, Zenas spoke to his horses, and the stage started on its twelve-mile trip to Barham.

It was a beautiful June day. Drifting islands of white clouds were scattered over the blue sky. A gentle breeze was blowing, and the balmy air was redolent with the scent of spring blossoms. Flights of robins rose and alighted in the pastures that lined the road; the brisk tapping of an occasional woodpecker resounded through the hard-wood growth; while frequent lines of flapping black crows made the landscape re-echo with the nasal tremolo of their cawing.

"Oso's cousins, talking to you, Perce! Remember the piece of steak he stole from you that first night on Tarpaulin?" said Jim. "Wonder how Uncle Tom's doing with his traps! I almost wish I was down there with him."

A shadow crossed Lane's unusually sober face. He did not like to hear Jim talk in that way.

The cultivated fields and pastures fell behind. The road, snakelike in its crookedness, became rougher and more hilly. Now and then they passed through dark-green, shady tracts of second-growth spruce and pine, successors to the giants that had once towered over the country. Briggs and Doggett, scanning these trees with professional eyes, com-

mented on their size and the amount of lumber they would make; while Lane and the stage driver contributed an occasional remark. Jim and the other two boys were silent. The woods were new to them. So they used their eyes instead of their tongues, and kept their ears open to catch what they could from the talk of the more experienced men.

By degrees the scenery grew still wilder and rougher. The road climbed steep hills and wound among mountains of very respectable size. Finally, on a bare, lofty summit Zenas brought his sweaty, panting horses to a willing stop. He pointed with

his whip.

"'On Jordan's stormy banks I stand an' cast a wistful eye," he quoted. "That's Barham basin, straight ahead! Yonder to the right's Nebo Mounttain; you can see Mount Washington from it on a clear day. That cucumber-shaped sheet of water at its foot's Lake Agawam; it's four miles long, and almost two across at the widest place. The Peavey lot comes down to its northern end."

The boys looked with all their eyes. Before them stretched a broad, saucer-shaped hollow, hemmed in by low mountains and comprising about twentyfive square miles, mostly wooded, but dotted here and there with white houses surrounded by farms and pastures. At the base of the hills on its western edge a little village clustered round a pointed church spire.

"Barham Four Corners!" said Zenas. "That's where you'll do your shopping. Giddap, Bill!"

Twenty minutes later they rolled up to the crossroads, and unloaded themselves and their belongings on the platform of Holway & Benner's store, which was also the post office.

Barham Four Corners was a typical Maine country village of perhaps two hundred people. Like many similar villages, it was much smaller than it had been years before. Three general stores, a wheelwright and blacksmith's shop, and a gristmill on Borden Stream did most of the business of the surrounding region. There was also a lawyer's office, bearing the sign, "Milo Grannitt." Two small churches and a grange hall ministered to the religious and social life of the community. The boys looked about with great interest. Barham Four Corners was to represent civilization to them for the next three months.

Their arrival apparently occasioned no surprise to the score of men and boys lounging about the crossroads just before the dinner hour. Nods, winks, and nudges, accompanied by low talk and some laughter, passed between the onlookers. Across the street on the sidewalk, under the lawyer's sign, stood two men, one dressed in black, tallish, stoop-shouldered, and rather cadaverous; the other, rougher-looking, burly, red-faced, and clad in a brown checked suit. After watching the boys for a short time, the two turned and entered the stairway leading to Grannitt's office.

A few minutes in Holway & Benner's gave the budding lumbermen the information they needed.

Roger, accompanied by Briggs and Doggett, went for dinner to John Creamer's, a few hundred feet from the corner; while Throppy, Percy, and Jim took their suitcases over to Ezra Barker's, about as far in the opposite direction. They arranged to stop at these houses until their camps should have been built in the woods near the mill.

After dinner they hired two teams and drove out four miles to the Peavey lot. Following Creamer's directions, they turned into a pasture on the right, after passing a large maple. Briggs surveyed the open, sloping field with an approving eye.

"This'll make a first-class 'sticking ground,' "he

exclaimed.

"What's that?" asked Percy.

"A place to dry the boards after they've been sawed. If possible, pick an open, windy slope, not too far from the mill, and near the road, so that it'll be easy to haul'em away. If they lie on the ground, or are put up solid without any air spaces, they soon sap-stain and spoil. So they're always piled several feet high, and the layers are separated by 'stickings,' narrow strips sawed an inch thick, set about eight feet apart. There's a good five acres in this pasture, and it ought to give an easy chance to stick a million feet."

They followed a wood road for some distance through a scrubby growth of spruce. Suddenly it entered a tract where the trees changed their appearance and became larger and straighter.

"This must be the beginning of the Peavey lot," said Lane. "Look at that pine! Yes, there's the blazed cross Mr. Creamer told us about."

He pointed to two straw-colored gashes, crossing each other at right angles, slashed through the reddish-brown bark into the underlying wood.

"The mill's about twenty rods farther on."

Briggs and Doggett had been casting keen glances at the tall, straight trunks about them.

"'Gene," said the former, "this is the finest stand of pine I ever set my eyes on. If the rest of it is as good as what we've seen already, it ought to saw out over fifty thousand to the acre."

Doggett nodded without replying. They drove on between the lines of lofty trees. A rabbit flitted across the road before them. On their left a partridge boomed up and flew heavily away to cover. The green twilight, checkered with sun and shadow, was steeped in balsamic odors.

It grew lighter ahead. Rounding a turn, they came in sight of a clearing, in the centre of which stood a wooden-roofed structure, without sides, and with a smokestack at one end.

"There's the mill!" exclaimed Lane.

Two minutes later everybody was examining the edifice that was to be the center of their thoughts and activities for the next three months. Briggs and Doggett at once began to inspect the machinery to learn if it was in shape for commencing operations, while Budge, realizing that the other three knew

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practically nothing about the mill, gave them a general idea of its construction and the way in which it worked.

"Here at the left end is a sixty-horse-power boiler that furnishes the steam to the engine right behind it. The two belts from those big fly wheels run to the pulleys that turn the arbor, the shaft on which the saw is fixed. This short cordurov roadway of spruce sticks on our right leads up to the 'brow.' The logs are hauled in on wooden 'scoots,' drawn by two horses. They are rolled off onto those two long stringers, reaching from the 'brow' to the track on which the carriage runs. Then the roller (that 'll be you, Jim) rolls 'em down, one by one, and puts 'em on the carriage, which the sawyer has jigged back to just the right place. After the stick has been 'dogged' so that it can't shift, the sawyer pulls his lever, moving the carriage forward and bringing the end of the log against that fifty-two-inch circular saw in the center of the mill. It's got sixty teeth, and it's going round seven hundred times a minute, so it doesn't do a thing to Mr. Log. As fast as the slabs and boards come off, the marker, who stands a few feet to the left of the sawyer, takes 'em in charge. He cuts the slabs into short pieces with that little slab saw near the central post, and shoves 'em down that shoot between the belts to the fireman (you, Perce). The marker measures the boards and chalks on 'em the number of feet they contain, and his helper pushes 'em out of the end of the mill

into the pit. Then I put each size on the 'rigging' where it belongs, and the yardman hauls 'em off to the sticking ground. That's all there is to it."

The process sounded simple enough; but the others stared somewhat dubiously at the silent col-

lection of machinery.

"You haven't told me what I'm to do," said

Throppy.

"Don't you fret," counseled Budge. "You're to be general utility man, and I'll guarantee there'll be enough odd jobs to keep you busy. There's always something happening round a mill."

Percy was gazing at the smokestack which rose from the front end of the boiler, just outside the

board roof.

"What's that wire barrel on top of the iron

chimney?" he demanded.

"The sparker! Some call it the bonnet. A mill of this sort has a strong draught, which carries no end of cinders up the stack; so there has to be something on its top to catch 'em, or the whole crew'd be kept busy putting out fires in the woods to leeward. Even with that, some little sparks get through the meshes, and you have to watch sharp on a windy day."

"You said I was to be fireman. Where do I

stand?"

"In the fire room, this open space back of the boiler at the foot of the slab-shoot. You'll know every square inch of it before the end of the summer, and sometimes you'll be liable to find it pretty warm.

Still, it won't be so bad as you might think, for there's always some air stirring under this open roof, even on the hottest days."

"I suppose my place'll be between those stringers,"

said Jim.

"Yes; and from the size of the pines we've just come through, I should say that your arms and shoulders wouldn't soften up much from lack of exercise."

"What are those two barrels for?" asked Throppy.

"To hold water. That outside one's for emergencies. The other, nearer the boiler, furnishes a supply for making all the steam used in the engine. This pipe is the inspirator, which keeps the barrel filled by drawing water through the supply pipe from some pond or brook; sometimes it has to be brought hundreds of feet. This other pipe's the injector, which sucks the water from the barrel into the boiler. Perce'll find that steel tank rather thirsty on a busy day; it's likely to drink up between two and three thousand gallons in nine hours."

Briggs and Doggett had by this time finished their

inspection of the engine and other machinery.

"How do you find things, Ote?" questioned Lane.

"Very fair, considering the mill's several years old. Two or three little parts are missing, but nothing that we can't replace easily. We'll probably find everything we need in those chests you've got the keys of. Well, let's take a stroll over the rest of the lot!"

The mill was advantageously located on a gentle slope, making it possible for the logs to be rolled easily upon the stringers. It had been set near the center of the fifty acres, so that the trees cut on the outer edges of the tract could be dragged in with the shortest possible average haul. Roads, radiating like wheel spokes, had been swamped out from it, and along these lay trunks enough for several days' sawing. The source of the water supply was a good-sized brook, about four hundred feet distant.

For almost two hours the party tramped along the stumpy roads or threaded their way between the barky trunks over the thick, soft, mounded carpet of dead needles. The growth was almost entirely white pine, with here and there a large spruce. The New Hampshire men were enthusiastic over the outlook.

"I've run a saw through millions of feet of lumber," said Briggs, "and much of it's been first-class stuff; but this tract, right through, beats anything I've ever seen or heard of. These trees are between eighty and two hundred years old. Some of 'em 'll go over a hundred feet tall, and 'll measure above thirty inches through, breast high. It's a wonder they've been allowed to stand so long; if they'd grown in our part of the country they'd have been in boards years ago. Eh, 'Gene?"

"That's right," agreed the less demonstrative Doggett.

"There's a group of five-log trees, and better.

Look at that giant! Bet he'll scale over two thousand feet!"

Doggett did not answer. He lifted his head and sniffed.

"I smell smoke," he said.

So did all the others. Budge looked serious.

"Somebody camping here? That won't do!"

They walked in the direction from which the breeze came, the fumes all the while growing stronger. Presently they reached a clearing in which stood a small shack. A white cloud was floating from its stovepipe.

"Might as well take the bull by the horns!" re-

marked Budge.

Going round to the front of the cabin, he rapped smartly on the door. It was opened by a tall, stoopshouldered man with white hair and beard; his features expressed surprise and suspicion as he scanned his unexpected visitors. Budge went at once to the point.

"What right have you to be living here?" he

demanded.

Amazement struggled with indignation on the supposed squatter's face. He glanced from one to another of the group. Gradually understanding dawned upon him, but his expression grew, if anything, more unfriendly.

"A better right than you have to be standing on my doorstep, insulting me," he replied at last. "I

own the land under my feet, and you don't."

Budge felt his face reddening. He, too, began to see light.

"Aren't we on the Peavey lot?" he stammered.

"No. You crossed the line fifty feet back. I'm Hiram Merrithew. I've owned this land, one hundred acres of it, and lived in this cabin more years than you are old. And further, young man, let me tell you this: So long as I'm above ground, neither you nor any other tree butchers will have a chance to slaughter God's green woods by running a portable mill on this lot!"

His face grew hard and his eye brightened as, disregarding Budge's attempted apologies, he turned away and slammed his door.

The timber cruisers beat a hurried retreat to the

Peavey lot.

"Here's the line," said Budge, flushed and sheepish. "I ought to have noticed when we crossed
it. John Creamer told me about Merrithew; queer
I didn't remember! Said he'd lived the life of a
hermit for over twenty years, and that he thought
a sight more of his trees than he did of men.
Well, we've made a bad start with our only
neighbor. Next time I'll know enough to approach
a stranger like a gentleman, even if I think he is in
the wrong."

"Then that knot of big pines wasn't on our lot,

after all," mourned Briggs.

It was almost five o'clock when they returned to the mill clearing; and all, Throppy in particular,

were more or less tired. For some time Percy had been indulging in sudden, violent gestures, and mut-

tering emphatically to himself.

"You may say all you please about big pines," he burst out, "but this lot produces one thing that I don't believe any other spot on earth can match, and that's mosquitoes! They're the thickest, healthiest, hungriest lot that ever presented their bills to me. I ran across some in the hollow back there that were almost as big as humming birds. Strange the rest of you haven't noticed 'em! They've drawn a gallon of blood from me since three o'clock."

"You don't look very pale, Perce," consoled Budge. "Cheer up! They won't stop very long."

"If they stay, I sha'n't," said Percy. "They're

even worse than Jim's flute."

Unhitching their horses, they prepared to start back.

"We'll build a couple of camps the first thing we do," remarked Lane. "A small one for Ote and 'Gene, and a bigger shack, about the size of the cabin on Tarpaulin, for us four. We'll fit it up inside as near as we can like the other, so that it 'll remind Jim of the island."

After supper that evening Lane came over to Ezra Barker's to discuss the situation with his mates. His bearing showed that he felt the responsibility that rested upon him. The others, even Jim, looked to him as their leader in their new venture. Win

or lose, the die was cast; they were in for it; it was too late to back out. The situation called for all the brains and grit they could muster.

"We've got to make a success of this," insisted Roger, resolutely. "We can do it; I know we

can."

"There's something odd about this place," said Percy. "I can't tell why, but somehow I feel it in my bones that the people here aren't particularly glad to see us."

"I've noticed the same thing," assented Jim. "They look at us in a peculiar way; and some are

positively surly."

"Well, we can't help that," observed Budge. "The only thing we can do is to give everybody a square deal and expect them to give us the same. Now, Jim, you've seen the mill and the lot, and you understand what we've got to do. How do you like the outlook?"

"I'm homesick for the salt water. It'll be the first summer I was ever away from it. There isn't enough change in the scenery to suit me. Everything'll be the same every morning, woods, mountains and all. Then there's the mill; you wouldn't say there was much beauty about that. But..."

He glanced toward Throppy and stopped. Budge and Percy understood. Jim would be glad to stand anything, no matter how unpleasant, if Throppy

would only get well.

A few hundred feet off, in Grannitt's office, dimly lighted by a sooted kerosene lamp, another conference was being held between the lawyer and his principal client.

"Well, Milo, now you've seen 'em, what do you

think of 'em?" queried Legore.

Grannitt laughed.

"What do you think?" he parried.

Hard Cash dropped his heavy hand carelessly on the table. The lamp flared, shooting a long, smoky

tongue of flame toward the ceiling.

"Nothin' there to be afraid of! The two men may know how to run a mill, but they don't know anythin' else. The others don't count, 'ceptin' p'r'aps that hulkin' dark-haired feller, an' he's jest overgrown boy, a big lump o' putty. They'll last quick. We'll git our money, Milo!"

The lawyer shifted his unlighted cigar from the

left corner of his mouth to the right.

"That big fellow's got more stuff in him than you think," he said. "But he's only in the gristle yet. Ten years from this time, when he's butted into a few stone walls and hardened up, he'll be a tough proposition to buck against. But I guess you're right about him now. We'll probably divide the cash, you taking the lion's share, as usual. Still, I don't like the set of his jaw!"

#### III

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DURING the next few days Budge was more than busy. The bulk of the planning fell upon him, as generalissimo of the expedition; but he found Jim and Percy most efficient lieutenants. Briggs and Doggett assumed the responsibility of getting the mill into shape to run, and of making out a list of everything that was needed, such as missing parts, tools, oil, and other supplies.

There were many important matters to be attended to before the business would be fairly under way. Men and horses were to be hired; camps must be built and furnished; food had to be arranged for; a contract must be entered into with the owner of the pasture, so that his land could be used as a sticking ground; a loan of five thousand dollars, with Lane, senior, and the other owners of the Peavey lot as security, was to be negotiated in Parcherville, the county seat, fifteen miles off; and an account had

to be opened with the Parcherville Savings and Trust

Company, so that several hundred dollars would be

forthcoming each week for current expenses. Last,

but no means least, Throppy, under Budge's direc-

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tion, entered into correspondence with various lumber dealers and box factories, regarding the sale of their prospective output.

Budge, assisted by Percy, uncrated his motor cycle, and devoted several hours to putting it in running order. On this machine he made a quick trip to Parcherville, where the loan was successfully engineered and satisfactory arrangements made with the bank; he also engaged an auto truck to take a load of miscellaneous supplies out to the mill. On his return to Barham he met Parker Slocum, owner of the pasture, in Milo Grannitt's office; and there a contract was drawn securing to Roger Lane and his associates the right to use said land as a sticking ground. Budge realized that he was paying double what the property was worth; but it was the only tract available for his purpose, and he had no time to quibble over the price.

Lumbermen have hearty appetites; so Budge arranged for a liberal supply of eggs, butter, and vegetables, and engaged Holway & Benner's delivery team to call twice a week. Milburn's meat cart passed the sticking ground on Tuesdays, and Wesley Murch went by with fish on Fridays; and both were notified to turn in to the mill. Joshua Kimball, who owned the nearest farm, a half mile off, agreed to send his boy Morgan down every morning with

four quarts of milk.

"What do you take us for, Budge?" asked Jim. "Cormorants?"

"Don't you worry, old man! After you've been at work a few days in this bracing pine air, you'll be hungry enough to eat boards; and we can't afford

to have you do that."

But the hardest work of all was the assembling of the rest of their working force. It was necessary to hire fifteen men more: six choppers; one loader; three teamsters, each with a two-horse team, to drag the heavily burdened scoots to the mill; a man to help roll logs across onto the brow and make himself generally useful; a pusher, to assist the marker; a yardman and his double team to haul the sawed lumber along the pit road to the yard; and two stickers to pile the boards.

"Boys!" exclaimed Budge. "Somehow we've simply got to dig up fifteen men. In a business way it means life or death to us. No men, no boards!"

The natives with whom they had dealt had been perfectly willing to take their money; but when it came to rendering any assistance in securing workers, they exhibited a strange lukewarmness. But Budge, spurred by necessity, did not relax his efforts. Ably seconded by Jim and Percy, and grudgingly aided by John Creamer, Ezra Barker and Holway & Benner, he canvassed the region for ten miles in every direction from Barham Four Corners, by team, motor cycle, and telephone. At the end of three days, by dint of coaxing, arguing, and particularly by promise of liberal payment, he had gotten his fifteen men, with the requisite number of two-horse teams.

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The three pairs of choppers were Corydon Stokes and Ike Murray; Peter Huston and Lem Bridge; and two Frenchmen, Joe Maliber and Louis Benoit. A sturdy, flaxen-haired Dane, Hans Jensen, had agreed to act as loader. Nat Goodhow, Jerry Ladd, and Gordon McAuliffe, all sons of Barham farmers, were to team the logs in to the mill; and Brad Martin had been secured as general-utility man. Young Tug Prince had hired out as marker's helper. Christian Bremer, Jensen's cousin, with his pair of strong blacks, was to haul the boards to the sticking ground, where Mark Potter and Sereno Goff had engaged to do the piling.

Budge drew a long breath, as he turned away from Holway & Benner's telephone, after clinching the last man; but he did not unbosom himself until he met the other boys after supper in their room at

Ezra Barker's.

"I can't understand," he exploded, "why it's so hard to hire men to work for us. I know, of course, that a farmer's time is pretty well taken up in the summer; but none of these fellows I've been after have been especially busy, and I've offered 'em topnotch wages. They seem to be afraid of us. I don't see why, for they're sure of their pay every week."

The others were unable to lend him any help in solving the riddle. The last few days had increased Jim's respect for Lane's knowledge and business ability to positive admiration.

"Budge," said he, "I never realized you knew so much. Where in the world did you get it, and how have you managed to hide it from us so long?"

Early the next morning the Peavey lot woke to life. During the forenoon men and horses kept coming in, until by the dinner hour the entire force had mustered. The choppers were busy along the roads with ax and saw, and the forest aisles resounded with the splintering crash of falling pines. Shouting teamsters hauled in scoot-loads of heavy logs, filled the stringers, and started a pile just above the brow.

Beneath the low board roof the mill crew worked actively under the direction of Briggs. The loose parts of the machinery were taken from the chests, the rubber belts were unrolled and slipped on, the bearings were oiled, and everything was put into condition for starting. Briggs straightened up and filed the saw, and swaged it, to set off the corners of the teeth.

"How do you find it, Ote?" asked Lane.

"In good shape, except for three or four bull's-eyes; and they're not large enough to do any hurt."

"What's a bull's-eye?" inquired Jim.

"One of those discolored spots, where the steel has become overheated. They weaken the metal, but don't bother much, unless there are too many of 'em."

"Those teeth look as if they were movable."

"Yes; if any break, you can take 'em out and put in new ones. The old type of circular saw was solid,

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and the breaking of a few teeth meant that it had to go back to its makers."

"What if something happens to this saw so that

you can't repair it?"

"There's another in that box; and I'm going to order a third next week. In case of accident, extra parts may save a long shut-down."

Anxious to learn all they could about the operation of the unfamiliar plant, Percy and Jim plied Budge with questions; and even Throppy showed signs of his old activity and interest.

"Well, Cap'n Lane," said Briggs, at last, "guess she's in running order. Let's fill the boiler!"

Taking off the manhole cover and inserting a spout, they began to force in water by means of a hand pump attached to the supply pipe. Everybody took his turn at the work.

"Say, Roger," said Briggs, as ne surrendered his place to Jim, "ever hear of the scrape Uncle Sim Browburn got into, filling Brad Dacey's boiler?"

"I knew Uncle Sim," answered Budge. "And I know that he used to drink more hard cider than was good for him; but I never heard anything about

Dacey's boiler."

"You're right when you say he was fond of hard cider," returned Briggs. "And that was the thing that got him into the scrape. Dacey had moved his mill to a new setting, and some of his crew, like a good many other portable-mill men, thought that operations couldn't be started properly without a

few gallons of apple juice. Some of the neighbors felt the same way, so in the evening they met to have a good time and fill the boiler. After pumping several minutes, they would sample the cider, and then go at it again. Before long Uncle Sim's knees got pretty shaky. Every little while he would tap the boiler with a hammer, claiming he could tell by the sound how high the water had risen inside. 'Up to there, boys!' he would say, patting the plates. Then they would take drinks all round and go back to pumping. In a few minutes Uncle Sim would make another test with his hammer. Tap! Tap! Tap! 'You're gaining, boys! Hang to it!' Another drink, and more pumping. And so they kept on for almost two hours, but not a drop showed in the water-glass. That seemed mighty queer! They couldn't understand it. At last Uncle Sim started out in the dark to walk round the end of the boiler. In a minute the others heard a splashing and spluttering, mixed with loud yells: 'Help, boys! I'm drownin'!' Those of 'em whose legs weren't too limber ran round the boiler and found Uncle Sim paddling for dear life in a couple of feet of water in a hollow between two cradle knolls. They fished him out, and soon discovered what the trouble was. They'd been having such a good time that they'd forgotten to shut the blow-off cock, and there wasn't a pailful of water in the boiler. It had run out as fast as they'd pumped it in. Uncle Sim never heard the last of that."

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"How much does this boiler hold?" asked Jim.

"About two thousand gallons. But it'll seem as if it held twice that before we get it filled."

Many hands made light work. Yet it was a long time before the water showed in the slanting glass.

All now turned to and gathered armfuls of dead, dry, pine limbs. Soon a hot blaze was roaring and leaping at the round black mouths of the battery of tubes at the forward end of the firebox.

"You're lord of the fire room, Perce!" said Lane.

"She's your boiler. Here!"

He tossed him a pair of black, gauntlet gloves,

their palms set with rows of steel rivets.

"Those'll help keep the pitch and splinters out of your hands. Ote and 'Gene'll have an eye on you. Better take your instructions from them till you get so that you understand your job!"

Percy pulled on the gloves, and started enthusi-

astically to cram the firebox full of dead pine.

"Not too fast, boy!" cautioned Doggett. "This boiler's cold. You mustn't try to get steam up too quick, or you'll be liable to crack or strain something. Keep all four corners well filled, so there'll be no dead air space, but don't drive her too hard."

Briggs also contributed an occasional suggestion, which Percy was glad to follow. He knew nothing about firing a boiler, but he was willing to learn. Soon the black needle on the dial of the gauge on the dome began to rise slowly.

While the boiler was steaming up, the two men

gave the engine a final looking over. When the gauge showed about forty pounds, Briggs tried the inspirator. For a while the white vapor hissed freely from the pipe into the barrel; then after a throaty sputtering came the water. A test of the three pet cocks on the boiler end to the right of the firebox door gave satisfactory results. It was not long before they had a hundred pounds of steam.

"All ready!" shouted Briggs.

He pulled down the whistle wire.

Whee-ee-ee! A shrill, sustained, ear-splitting screech pealed through the pines. After a few seconds the sawyer shut it off.

"Enough of that for a while! Open the throttle and start the engine, 'Gene!"

Doggett obeyed. Quickly steam and water began to blow out of the drip cocks. The great flywheels commenced to revolve, at first slowly, then faster and faster. Belts, pulleys, and shafting woke to life with a low rumble like distant thunder. The teeth on the rim of the whirling saw became a narrow, shadowy blur. The entire mill was in motion.

Everybody stood at his post. Pushing his lever from him, Briggs jigged the carriage back opposite the ends of the stringers, on which lay a twelve-foot log, beautifully straight and smooth and over two feet in diameter. Following his directions, Jim, stoutly but somewhat clumsily, heaved the trunk upon the carriage with his short rolling-hook, and together they "dogged" it firmly in place.

#### BREAKING IN

Briggs pulled his lever toward him. The carriage, bearing the log, moved toward the revolving saw, until the blur of teeth touched the pine butt. With a high-pitched, whining shriek the sharp steel points ripped through the soft wood, throwing a thin yellow spray up against the dust-board, which hung from the roof to protect the sawyer's face.

A few seconds later Doggett was cutting the first slab into short pieces with the slab-saw, and pushing them down the shoot to Percy in the fire room. Their

summer's work was fairly begun.

That afternoon they sawed about three thousand feet of boards, occasional stops being advisable for making adjustments in the machinery. Each boy found that his own particular work was sufficient to keep him fully occupied. All were glad when at four o'clock Briggs signaled Percy to pull the whistle. Doggett shut the throttle of the engine and everything came to a stop.

"We'll close down an hour early to-day," said he, "so it 'll give us plenty of time to fix those

camps."

During the three days the boys had spent in drumming up the remainder of their crew, the two New Hampshire men had been working on a little group of buildings for the men and the horses. Two of these rough houses, built with boards previously sawed by the mill, and roofed with tarred paper, had been practically completed; and Budge had sent out the necessary furnishings from Parcherville, in

the auto truck. A very little labor would put the

boys in condition to begin housekeeping.

"Now, young man," remarked Briggs to Percy, "I'll show you how to fix your boiler for the night, so that everything'll be ready for starting to-morrow morning. I'll tell you what to do, but I want you to do it yourself; that's the only way to learn."

Under his directions Percy opened the steam valve of the injector and forced water into the boiler, until it was full to the top of the highest gauge. Filling his pail two or three times from the barrel, he wet down the dry sawdust, bark, and chips around the firebox, to prevent any danger of sparks creeping out from the ash pit and burning the mill in the night. Then he banked the fire by filling the firebox full of green slabs and sawdust. Going around to the front of the boiler, he opened the smoke-arch door, propped it in place, and put the "banking-board" close up against the ends of the fifty-two tubes to kill the draught.

"You'll catch on quick," said Briggs, who had watched him keenly. "The fire'll come up in short order in the morning. I've known it to keep for

days, after it's been banked like that."

The native portion of the force soon disappeared. Five of the men went off in a Ford car. The others with their horses found quarters at neighboring farms or in the village. The New Hampshire pair and the four boys were left alone on the Peavey lot.

Thanks to Budge's foresight, everything was there

#### BREAKING IN

to make them comfortable. Two of the camps stood in the edge of the woods about a hundred feet from the mill. One, patterned almost exactly after the cabin on Tarpaulin, was for the use of the boys. The other, somewhat smaller, belonged to Briggs and Doggett. Both were supplied with bunks, board tables, camp stools, small stoves, iron sinks, and a generous stock of ordinary dishes and cooking utensils. Flour, potatoes, canned goods, and other eatables had been provided in abundance.

"We'll live well, if we don't do anything else,"

said Budge.

Jim picked up a package from the table. "That feels like beefsteak," he observed.

Breaking the string, he opened the paper. It was

beefsteak, tender and juicy.

"Where's the frying-pan, Budge?" he asked. "Bring in some kindling, Perce, and start a fire in that stove; you want to keep your hand in for your job at the mill. Throppy, go up to the spring and fetch a pail of water! I'll be cook for to-night."

Soon the thick slices of steak were sputtering in the spider. A dozen potatoes were peeled and sliced for frying, a batch of biscuit mixed up, and a can of peaches opened. The supper that the boys sat down to would not have shamed a professional cook, and they all brought appetites to match it. Tired, mosquito bitten, with blistered, splintery hands and lame backs, they attacked the food ravenously.

"I feel as if I was hollow to the toes," said Percy.

When they had finished, the table looked as if a cyclone had struck it. Budge surveyed the scene of devastation with whimsical regret.

"Guess I'll have to revise the commissary estimates," he mourned. "What did I tell you about

woods appetites?"

After the dishes had been washed, the cabin put to rights, and various odd jobs done, they took their camp stools out of doors, and sat down to enjoy the cool of the evening. Briggs and Doggett were smoking their pipes in front of their own camp.

The sun had sunk, and the flaming west burned out to a dusky, angry red beyond the serried black trunks. From the sedgy borders of Lake Agawam the frogs were choiring tunefully. Faint and far through the clear air echoed the melancholy trumpeting of a solitary loon. A cool west wind sprang up, drawing a slumberous music from the swaying pine boughs.

"Sounds something like the surf on Tarpaulin, doesn't it?" said Jim. "Just as we used to hear it through the fog when we came in from pulling our trawls. There's the same sky overhead, and the same ocean of air. They're the only things that reconcile me to being away from the salt water. But here the green of the foliage is fixed, while the color of the sea was always changing."

"Then you think you may come to like it, after all?" rejoiced Budge.

#### BREAKING IN

"It's not so bad. I've seen places a good deal worse."

He stretched his hand toward the darkening forest. "But what a pity it is to destroy a beautiful growth of trees like that for the sake of money; to turn it into dollars for men to steal and get drunk on and gamble with and fight over! Now it's a big wind organ, calm and peaceful and almost holy, the home of hundreds of birds and little animals. I can understand how that old hermit feels about it, over there alone in his cabin. Those trees started before our grandfathers were born; and our grandchildren (if we ever have any) 'll be dead long before this lot grows up so large again. That's one thing in favor of the sea—men can't hurt it. It 'll be just the same as it is now, when we're forgotten."

Budge felt obliged to take some exceptions to his friend's view.

"I won't say you're altogether wrong, Jim; but I don't think you're quite just to the lumbermen. If these trees were never cut, by and by they'd stop growing and die and fall down and rot without doing anybody any good. Now they're going to be turned into boards for all sorts of useful purposes. Besides, the money that comes to the people who work about this mill will help furnish food and clothing and shelter for more than a dozen families, to say nothing of paying a good part of the expenses of our education. So, after all, we're not such abandoned criminals as old Merrithew 'd make us out!"

Jim shook his head.

"Yes . . . there's that way of looking at it, of course. But I've something to back up my view, too."

Percy, who for the last fifteen minutes had been vigorously defending himself from the mosquitoes, leaped to his feet and snatched up his camp stool.

"I can't stand this any longer, fellows! Let's go

in!"

The others followed his example.

"Feel like giving us a tune on your violin, Throppy?" inquired Budge.

"Not to-night. I'm a little tired. I will to-

morrow."

Glancing slyly at Percy, Jim gave a modest cough.

"If anybody should ask me for a few notes on the flute, . . ." he began.

Percy bolted for the door.

"Help!" he cried. "Let me out! I'm going to bunk with the mosquitoes!"

"We'll wait till to-morrow night and have a con-

cert," said Budge.

Twenty minutes later all were sound asleep on their beds of spruce boughs.

#### IV

#### FROM STUMP TO STICK

A WOODPECKER, hammering briskly on a nearby pine, was the bell-boy that roused Percy Whittington from a dreamless slumber at half past five the next morning. Starting up, he found that Jim and Budge were already astir. Budge made a warning gesture toward Throppy's bunk.

"Don't wake him! This sleep 'll do him a world

of good. Let's go down for a swim!"

Dressing cautiously, the three tiptoed out and closed the door. A column of smoke from the stove-pipe of the other camp, and the clink of a stewpan, told that Briggs and Doggett were preparing breakfast.

It was a beautiful June morning. The early sunlight, filtering through the dark-green foliage, was reflected from thousands of glittering needles. A thin, bluish haze from the smoking chimney hung above the clearing. Birds sang in the treetops, and chipmunks scampered over the rounded knolls of dead spills between the dark, straight, barky trunks. Threading their way down toward the lake, the boys soon caught sight of its unruffled blue.

They stood presently on a white sand beach, with a rocky promontory on one side and a sedgy cove on the other. Outside the rushes floated a quarter-acre of lily pads.

Percy, the first in, found deep water off the end of the point, and dived with a whoop. Jim and Budge quickly joined him, and for fifteen minutes they swam and frolicked; then they came out, and dressed.

There was a splash beyond the pads; Jim was all interest.

"What fish is that?"

"Pickerel!" replied Budge. "And a big one! We'll hire a boat, and have some fun trolling before and after working hours."

"What's the matter with building a punt of our own?"

"Nothing! We can do it like a die, if you'll be the ship carpenter. We'll have plenty of boards."

The smell of pine smoke was pleasant in their nostrils as they once more came in sight of the mill and the little, black-roofed, yellow-sided camps beyond it. Stevens was still asleep.

"Better start up your fire, Perce," said Budge.

"Jim and I'll see to getting breakfast."

Briggs was already at the mill. Under his tuition Percy took down the banking board, dropped the smoke-arch door, opened his draughts, and threw in plenty of fresh slabs. Soon the flames were crackling and leaping at the tube ends. The arrow of the

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steam gauge, which was down to almost nothing, began to mount steadily.

"Go and get your breakfast," said the sawyer.
"I've had mine. I'll keep an eye on her till you come back."

Bananas, cereal and milk, with crisp bacon and potatoes, and the biscuits remaining from the night before, made them a hearty meal. Stevens was now up, and ate with them.

"How are you feeling, Throppy?" asked Jim.

"Fine! I slept like a log. I'm going to like this place."

After breakfast the various household duties were divided among the four, and it was decided that every week the different tasks should be allotted afresh.

"One thing we'll settle right now," said Budge, "and that is that the cook sha'n't wash dishes in the spring; if he does he's to be taken out and hung to the tallest pine. Now, fellows, I don't see why we can't get along all right. I've arranged with Mrs. Kimball to do our washing. She'll bake a pot of beans and fry a big batch of doughnuts for us every Saturday; and, if we need any other extra cooking, she'll do it some time in the week. So we sha'n't starve to death."

At seven Percy pulled the whistle. Doggett was oiling the machinery, while Briggs filed the saw. The Ford came in through the wood road, and disembarked its five passengers. The other men and the teamsters with their horses soon appeared. The

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gauge now showed a hundred pounds of steam, the stringers were full of logs, and the mill was ready to start.

A black-and-white hound with drooping ears and a melancholy face trotted through the clearing.

"Hulloo!" said Budge. "Whose dog is that?"

"He my dog," said Joe Maliber, one of the French-Canadian choppers. "I shoot more dan a hundred rabbit over him last winter. Allez, Jack!"

The hound followed his master up a scoot road toward the chopping ground. Soon he was heard giving tongue, evidently on the trail of his favorite game.

Before beginning to saw, Briggs and Budge came to a final decision as to the kind of lumber into which the logs should be turned.

"In my opinion," said Briggs, "to get the most out of a fancy lot like this, we ought to saw two-thirds of it into square-edged, inch boards and two-inch plank, or round-edge, high-grade plank for house finish or boat boards, and into pattern stocks; the other third can go into box boards."

"How many feet should we turn out a day?"

"With good luck and not too many shut-downs for repairs we ought to get between ten and twelve thousand, or sixty to seventy thousand a week. Of course, rainy days 'll knock down our average."

They were interrupted by a furious hissing. A white cloud poured from the safety valve on the top

of the steam dome.

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"What's the trouble?" cried the new fireman, in alarm. "Has anything burst?"

Briggs laughed.

"She's only blowing off! Look at your gauge and you'll see that it's over one hundred and fifteen. When she blows down to that the valve 'll close again. Don't crowd your fire so hard! With too much pressure on, your steam goes to waste, and you eat the water out of the boiler pretty fast. Don't forget one thing! When you're handling steam you're dealing with the real stuff, and it's your business to see it doesn't get away from you. Gunpowder or dynamite isn't in it with bottled fog yearnin' to break loose! When a boiler lets go it's war and pestilence and sudden death. Remember that, my lad! I'll tell you another hard-cider story; only this one isn't quite so funny as the first. The fireman of a portable mill upcountry took sick one Saturday and went home. It was in the winter, and he'd been running the boiler with the safety valve tied down, so she wouldn't waste steam by blowing off. Foolish thing to do; but sometimes it's done. Before he left he shut off the steam gauge. Monday morning he didn't show up, so they had to find somebody else; and the new man happened to be full of hard cider. They asked him if he understood about firing a boiler, and the question tickled him so he almost laughed himself to death. So they let him show what he could do. He kept crowding wood into the firebox, but still the steam needle didn't

register a pound. By and by the boiler began to rock; and just then he happened to notice that the gauge was shut off. He opened the valve, and the hand jumped clean 'round the dial as far as it could go. He lost his head, grabbed a pail of cold water, and hove it into the firebox. The second it struck the crown sheet, she went up, and the mill went with her. It blew the marker into a slab-pile, chinked him in so tight they had to pick him out in handfuls. That's what a boiler can do when it tries; and I don't want to see this one try. But you needn't get nervous! I'll keep an eye on the steam gauge and water glass and see that nothing happens, while you're learning. She's perfectly safe so long as the water's over the crown sheet."

A log was already in place on the carriage. Briggs grasped his lever and the work of the day began. Throppy had been told by Budge that there was nothing for him to do at present, but that he ought to become familiar with all the details of the work, as he could help later.

Life in the woods was a novel thing to the city boy. He determined to follow a tree from the moment it was attacked by the choppers until the boards sawed from it were piled on the sticking ground, "from stump to stick," as the expression goes. Walking up the path to the crystal-clear spring that supplied them with water, he struck out through the pines toward the ringing ax-strokes.

His feet sank into the soft, brownish duff. Little

### FROM STUMP TO STICK

spruces with light green tufts on the tips of their branches rose here and there. He crossed beds of moss laced with trailing partridge vines and dotted with springing ferns. A walk of a few minutes brought him to where Maliber and Benoit were chopping. Joe greeted him cordially.

"You come to see us cut down tree, eh? You

watch!"

A hundred-foot pine stood by the side of the scoot road. With their axes Joe and his mate cleared away the small trees and underbrush around it.

"We lay him that way," said Joe, indicating the

direction in which he wished to fall the giant.

A dozen blows with his keen ax cut a scarf three or four inches deep into the yellowish wood, a half foot above the ground on the side toward which the pine was to be dropped. Picking up their two-handled cross-cut saw, Louis sprinkled it on both sides with kerosene oil from a bottle in his hip pocket, to cut the pitch, so that the blade would run easily. Kneeling, one at each handle, they began cutting through the tree on the side opposite the scarf. The sharp, steel teeth ate their way in toward the heart of the butt, and at last the saw began to bind, as the weight above pressed down upon it.

"Wedge, Louis!" ordered Joe.

A hard-wood wedge, driven into the cut behind the saw, eased the pressure. Again they pulled at the handles, until finally only a narrow hinge remained between the points of the teeth and the scarf.

"Far enough!" grunted Louis.

A few blows on the butt of the wedge with the flat of an ax; the top of the pine quivered and the trunk swayed forward as the cut opened.

"Look out! Dere she goes!"

A rending and snapping of fibres, a rushing swoop, a cracking of branches, and down came the heavy trunk with a tremendous crash. A shower of twigs and needles followed it. Joe had laid the tree exactly where he wanted it, parallel with the scoot-road.

Taking their double-bitted axes, with a blade on each side, one ground keen and thin for regular chopping, the other thicker and heavier for cutting knots, the two Frenchmen began to "limb" the trunk, their blows on the dry, brittle stubs echoing like pistol shots. Then they sawed the tree into logs, four of sixteen feet in length, and two of twelve.

Nat Goodhow came along the road with his scoot, Hans Jensen, the loader, walking behind it. The "scoot" was a heavy oak sled, shod with maple, with two stout "bunks," or crossbars, on which the logs were laid. Cross-lifting with their peaveys, Nat and Hans, putting out all their strength, succeeded with the help of skids in getting three of the big pine sticks upon the scoot. There they were chained securely. Standing upon their front ends, Nat started his pair of sturdy grays. Throppy followed.

The road to the mill was rough and set with stumps. Time and again smoke followed the run-

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ners as the bulky sled ground over some small stick or log. But the horses were stout and Nat drove them skillfully; and at last the scoot halted on the brow.

There the load was discharged and turned over to Jim's control. As the stringers were full, and as these particular logs would have to wait till those in front of them were sawed, Throppy sat down near by, to watch operations.

The sight was full of fascination for him. At one end of the low roof rose the battered stack, swaying slightly, despite its wire guys. From the sparker on its top the straw-colored smoke oozed lazily, shot with black cinders, which showered down continually upon the stumpy ground. Vanishing whiffs of white steam escaped here and there from boiler and engine. Under the roof the motion of wheels and pulleys and running rubber belts caught the eye; and in the heart of all whirled the great saw with its bright and dark rings.

Briggs, hat and shoulders sprinkled with piny dust, stood at his lever, controlling the sliding carriage. A fresh log moved toward the saw. Arrh! A knot. Arr-rrh! Another. Arr-rr-rrh! A complaining shriek, as a short section of bark and wood came off. Back went the carriage, and Briggs pulled the set-lever toward him twice. Again the log slid against the remorseless teeth. Arr-rr-rr-R-RR-RRH! A sustained, vindictive screech, accompanied by a rockety puffing of the exhaust, rising as

the saw went through the wood, and then dying away, until lost in the thrumming monotone of the

machinery.

The slab slapped down upon the table. Briggs jigged the carriage back and began cutting off the first board. Meanwhile, short, sharp, shrill yelps from the smaller saw proclaimed that the slab was being reduced to firewood under Doggett's experienced hands, and tossed down the slab shoot between the running belts from the great flywheels.

In the fire room at the boiler-end stood P. Whittington, pulling the sections down the shoot with an ice pick, and pitching them into the firebox. He wore a quarter-sleeved jersey, and old, white, duck trousers and tennis shoes. His bare arms were sunburnt red-brown, like those of an Indian. On his head was a faded gray felt hat, brim pulled down all around, and a hole through its top, which stuck up to a point.

"Where did you get that hat, Perce?" chaffed

Throppy.

"Fresh from Paris; Worth's latest creation," flung

back the busy fireman.

"After you've wrestled a few cords of those slabs, the handle of a tennis racket or the steering wheel of an auto 'll feel pretty good, eh?"

"All in a lifetime," responded Percy, nonchalantly. Perspiration streamed down his cheeks as he faced the blaze in the firebox. His eyes frequently sought the steam gauge and the water glass. He was thor-

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oughly interested in his work, and determined to make good.

A live spark dropped into the dead needles near Throppy, and set them smoking. He ground the tiny fire out under his heel. The logs in which he was interested were steadily nearing the mill end of the stringers. Beyond them projected the square, wooden shoot, from the mouth of which the sawdust, drawn by the blower from under the saw, was spinning out in a thin, windy stream.

Between the stringers, Jim, bare-armed like Percy, but with far larger frame and muscles, was busy with his rolling-hook. Aided by an occasional suggestion from Briggs, he was fast mastering the art of handling the heavy logs. Admiringly, Throppy

noted the play of his banded sinews.

The first of Throppy's logs was now being sawed. Going round to the other end of the mill, he watched the marker at his work. As fast as the boards came off, Doggett laid his rule across each, and penciled on it the number of feet it contained; then young Tug Prince pushed it along the hard-wood rolls, and gave it a final shoot off the last into the pit.

Occasionally the marker "pegged up" his count on the tally board above the slab bench. A solid square of one hundred holes gave him opportunity for keeping a record of anything up to that number of feet; to one side of this square was a row of ten holes for reckoning the hundreds; while another similar row over its top sufficed for tallying the thousands.

Thus he could tell at any time just how much had been sawed that day. Other tally-boards beside the first afforded a chance for recording boards of different thicknesses.

Budge, standing on the floor of the pit at the end of the mill, received the boards from the pusher, and distributed them among the three or four different wagons, or "riggings," standing ready. Chris Bremer, the yardman, came up the pit road with his blacks. Backing his empty wagon into its place, he harnessed his pair to one of the loaded "riggings" and started back for the sticking ground. Throppy accompanied him; he was determined to see the process through.

At the ground Chris dumped the boards off; and Mark Potter and Sereno Goff piled them up. The pine that had raised its lofty head over a hundred feet in air only a few hours before had been reduced to brush, sawdust, and perhaps a thousand and a half feet of boards, drying on the sticks.

It seemed almost a pity. As Throppy glanced from the stately, dark-green forest to the flat piles of yellowish lumber he understood something of Merrithew's prejudice against tree butchers.

Whee-ee-ee!

Percy had pulled the whistle. Half past eleven. Throppy started back for the mill and dinner.

THE partly sawed log on the carriage was finished; then the mill shut down. Percy opened the smoke-arch door and propped it, and everybody went to dinner. The choppers and other local men straggled in, to eat from their tin pails under the adjacent pines and the mill roof. The teamsters unhooked and fed their horses. After the meal was over, some of the men lighted their pipes.

Budge sauntered out toward the county road. Jim, Throppy, and Percy sat down to listen to the talk of the men. The hot noon air was fragrant with the smell of sawdust and the odor of myriads of pine

needles.

"Heard anything of that moose lately?" asked Jerry Ladd of Gordon McAuliffe.

Percy pricked up his ears.

"Yes," returned McAuliffe. "Cal Wooster saw him two nights ago on the upper edge of his pasture. Just got a glimpse of him, and then he was gone."

"I didn't know there were any moose in this part

of the state," said Percy.

"There aren't, generally. This one must have

wandered down out of the big woods. He's been seen about here, off and on, for six months."

"I've a twenty-two rifle in my suitcase," observed Percy. "Thought it might be useful for target shooting, if nothing more. Guess I'll put it together and look round a little."

McAuliffe's laugh was almost a sneer. He was of a clumsy, stumpy build, with a long upper lip and a disagreeable mouth.

"An animal as big as that 'd mind a twenty-two about as much as he would the bite of one of these mosquitoes," he remarked, sarcastically. "Besides, it's close time. It'd cost something to kill that moose!"

Budge came up the road with a handful of letters and papers.

"Here you are, fellows! Everybody gets something."

The boys received their mail joyously.

"Where in the world did that drop from?" inquired Jim. "An aëroplane?"

"Barham rural free delivery," answered Budge. "We're Route Four, Box Five. The mail carrier goes by at half past eleven. I nailed a box up on a post at the entrance of our road last night. Holway & Benner promised to tell him to start leaving mail for us to-day."

Bremer's blacks, tied to a neighboring pine, were stamping and switching their tails.

"Horse flies!" said the Dane. "I'll fix 'em!"

Taking an old tin can, he drew some engine oil from the barrel and rubbed it over the hot, twitching skin of his pair. The other teamsters followed his example.

"That 'll keep 'em from being bitten until they

sweat it off," said Bremer.

"Black flies in May, midges in June, mosquitoes and horse flies all summer," commented McAuliffe, sardonically. "There's always something to bother round a portable mill. Wet in the spring, hot in the summer, cold in the winter; snow and ice and rain and mud. And sometimes there's other things you'd never look for."

He glanced about at his mates and winked meaningly; two or three winked back. It was the same secret understanding that had puzzled the boys before. Briggs changed the subject by taking a lump

of bluish metal from his pocket.

"See what I picked out of a board this morning!"
He handed it round. It was two-thirds of a flattened bullet.

"Must have been fired into the tree years ago, and the scar healed over," said Briggs. "Sawed clean through it."

"Do you often run across things of that sort?"

asked Jim.

"Now and then. Nails don't trouble us much. They're so small we can cut 'em off. But spikes are a different proposition. When we strike one of them, the fire flies and the teeth go. Once I hit two rail-

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road spikes; they took three or four teeth and shoulders, but the saw got through 'em. Keep the bullet, boys! I don't want it."

He started to file the saw, and the boys went over to watch him. Meanwhile Doggett was oiling up.

"How long do those inserted teeth last?" asked

Percv.

"A set ought to saw about two hundred thousand feet of good pine like this, or over a hundred thousand of oak. Then we throw 'em away. Come on, 'Gene! Let's fix that loose belt that kept slipping off this morning!"

Sawyer and marker unlaced the belt, cut off an end, punched new holes, and laced it up again. Before they finished, half past twelve had come, and the whistle screeched deafeningly while Percy held the wire down for fifteen seconds. Soon the saw was throwing pine dust again and the mill was in full activity.

After watching the work for a while, Throppy wandered out into the woods. Gradually the rumble of machinery and the hissing of steam were softened by distance, though the shriek of the saw, rising and dying away, continued to be distinctly audible. Unconsciously he followed a course that led him toward Merrithew's lot.

A quarter hour of aimless but enjoyable tramping brought him to a deep gully. Its sides were lined with mossy rocks and ledges; through its bottom flowed a tinkling brook. Suspecting that this stream

might contain trout, he descended to investigate. To his amazement, his ears were greeted by a groan, followed by an unintelligible muttering.

He stopped and listened. Another groan, and then another. Somebody must be hurt. Throppy hurried down the gully in the direction of the sounds. They grew louder, and soon he came in sight of the figure of a man lying upon a ledge. His legs were covered, almost up to the knees, by a large rock, which had evidently fallen upon them.

Throppy gave a shout and leaped forward. The man, who lay back to him, turned his head, then tried to rise, but collapsed with an exclamation of pain. It

was Merrithew, the hermit.

The boy was quickly at the prisoner's side. Pushing his hands under the rock, he lifted hard; but it was so heavy that he could not even stir it. Merrithew groaned again and shut his eyes, Throppy ceased his unavailing efforts and started up.

"I'm going for help!" he cried. "I'll be back in a

little while!"

The hermit made no reply, but his face showed that he was suffering intensely. Throppy sprang up the bank and ran as fast as he could to the mill. Without wasting a moment, he explained Merrithew's predicament.

Briggs stopped the saw in the middle of a log, Doggett closed the throttle, and the whole crew

knocked off.

"Shut your draught!" ordered the sawyer. "Let

her blow off! It won't do any hurt for a few minutes. Fetch along those peaveys and rolling-hooks! That crowbar, too! We'll need it. Take the ax, 'Gene! It may come in handy."

Everybody grabbed whatever he could lay his hands on, and started on the run for the gully, Throppy in the lead. In a short time they were leaping down the bank. They were none too soon. Merrithew had fainted.

Briggs pursed his lips into a whistle.

"No wonder he couldn't drag himself out from under that rock! It's a good lift for half a dozen men."

It proved to be all that, before they were able to raise it off the hermit's legs. It was evident that his feet and ankles were badly bruised, but just how seriously they could not tell. He was still insensible.

"Better take him to his own camp, hadn't we?"

asked Budge.

"I guess that's where he'd want to go," said Briggs.
"Cut a couple of those little spruces, 'Gene, and we'll make a stretcher."

In a short time the rough litter was ready. Lifting Merrithew carefully, they laid him upon it. From their previous accidental visit to his camp, they had an idea of its general direction; so it was not long before they reached it. The door was unfastened. Carrying the unconscious man in, they placed him in his bunk; he stirred and muttered feebly.

"I'll go on my motorcycle for Doctor Melvin,"

volunteered Budge. "The rest of you can give him first aid until we get back."

He was off on the run. In a few minutes the quick thudding of his exhaust could be heard as he sped out of the mill clearing. Merrithew's shoes were taken off and he was made as comfortable as possible. Meanwhile a fire was kindled in the stove and a kettle of water put on to heat. The hermit lay silent, his eyes wandering from one to another of his rescuers; now and then a spasm of pain contorted his face.

"Well," said Briggs, "Gene and I might as well go back to the mill. We can't do anything more here."

Percy went with them; but Jim and Throppy remained. In less than half an hour they heard the exhaust of Budge's machine, mingled with that of a motor car. A little later Budge himself appeared, accompanied by a strongly built young man with a pleasant face.

"Here's Doctor Melvin!" remarked Budge. "I was lucky enough to catch him just before he started on his afternoon trip. We didn't lose any time

getting here."

"Sorry to hear of your accident, Mr. Merrithew," said the doctor. "If other people didn't call me any oftener than you do, I'd starve to death."

He made a quick examination of the injured man's

limbs.

"Badly bruised, but nothing broken, so far as I

can tell without the X-ray," was his verdict. "The rough places on that rock must have held it up, or your legs'd have been crushed flat. With your good health you ought to be all right in a few weeks. About all you'll need to do is to bathe your feet in hot water two or three times a day, and keep off'em for a while."

The hermit's face showed that he did not relish the idea of inactivity.

"But how am I to do my cooking and other camp work?" he asked.

"You're not going to do anything at all for a while. You're to keep quiet. You can thank these young men and their friends that things are no worse. You'll have to lean on them for a fortnight or so. Guess they'll see that a neighbor doesn't suffer!"

Budge jumped at the chance of atoning for his

inconsiderate speech of some days before.

"We'll be glad to look out for him," he offered. "It'll be no work at all for one of us to run over here any time and do whatever is needed."

Mingled feelings struggled on Merrithew's face.

"I should think I ought to be able to hobble about and do what little has to be done, myself," he persisted, stubbornly.

But the doctor was equally stubborn.

"Not for a minute! You'll do just as I tell you and lie flat on your back, or I'll throw up your case. It's the only way, unless you want to be taken up to the village, hire a room, and have somebody nurse

you. And you'll be a good deal more comfortable right here in your own camp."

The hermit groaned and capitulated.

"Well, I s'pose I'll have to do as you say. I'll pay 'em."

Melvin laughed.

"You can settle that between yourselves. Guess it won't be very hard for you to patch up an agreement."

With a few final instructions regarding the care of his patient the doctor departed. The water was not yet hot enough to use. Merrithew lay back and closed his eyes, while Budge, Jim, and Throppy stepped outside to talk the matter over.

"Let me take care of him," begged Throppy. "The rest of you are busy and I haven't a thing to do. It 'll be light work, and it'll help me to feel that I'm

doing something to earn my salt."

Jim and Budge exchanged glances. Each read assent in the other's look.

"He's your patient, Throppy," consented Budge. "Only you must promise to call on us for help in case there's any heavy lifting or other such work to be done. Perhaps you can smooth out the unpleasantness I started by going at him bullheaded. But don't say anything again about not earning your salt; I don't like to hear you talk that way. Come on, Jim! Let's hike back to the mill!"

The two disappeared toward the Peavey lot, leaving Throppy with his charge. He stepped inside the

cabin and put a couple of sticks of dry birch into the stove. Soon the water began to steam. Glancing at the bunk, he saw that the hermit's eyes were open.

"What shall I empty this kettle into?" asked

Throppy.

Merrithew nodded toward a foot-bath in a corner. Throppy filled it, and presently, with his assistance, the cripple was sitting in a chair, his bruised and swollen feet in the hot water. It was a painful treatment, but a beneficial one. At the end of a half hour he went back to his bunk.

Throppy did what little was necessary to put the room in order. Then he sat down by the table.

"Don't you want to read?" asked his patient.

"There's some books and magazines."

Selecting from the well-stocked shelf a current periodical, Throppy was soon deep in an article on a new application of electricity. Halfway through it, he glanced up, and found Merrithew regarding him with a steady gaze.

"Can I do anything for you?" asked the boy.

"No."

The next time Throppy looked, the recluse's eyes were shut and his regular breathing told that he was sleeping soundly. He did not wake till the mill whistle screeched at five o'clock. To please him, Throppy consented to stay to supper, and, aided by his suggestions, began to prepare a light meal. Against one wall stood a kitchen cabinet, fully equip-

ped, and abundantly supplied with provisions. Throppy toasted a few biscuits and opened a can of soup. He was interrupted by a knock at the door. Jim, Budge, and Percy had dropped over to see how he was getting on.

"We won't come in this time. How's your

patient?"

"In some pain; but as well as could be expected."

"Can't we help?"

"Nothing to do! I'll be home later."

After supper Throppy cleared up. The excitement of the afternoon had somewhat overtaxed his strength and he moved about slowly. Merrithew was watching him with keen eyes.

"Aren't you well?"

"Only a little tired. I worked too hard last winter at college and my full strength hasn't come back yet. But this summer in the woods ought to put me on my feet."

He coughed slightly. The hermit looked concerned, but did not pursue the topic further. In-

stead, he began speaking of his accident.

"We had a heavy rain two weeks ago, and it must have washed the earth out from beneath that rock. I slipped off its top and fell in front of it just as it started to move. Before I could get my feet out they were pinned down. If you hadn't found me I'd be there now. It was too far off for me to make anybody else hear."

"You know my opinion of portable sawmills," he

continued. "But I'll have to confess it was lucky for me that you boys were operating on the Peavey lot. Sorry I spoke to you as I did; but your light-haired friend stirred me up."

"He's blamed himself for it ever since," said

Throppy, eagerly.

"He needn't feel that way. Tell him everything's all right. Now there's nothing more you can do for me to-night. I'd be glad to offer you accommodations here; but you'll sleep better in your own bunk."

"It doesn't seem hardly right for me to leave you alone."

"I've lived this way for more than twenty years. Nursed myself through an attack of the grip once. Nothing'll happen to me. Go and get a good night's rest."

Throppy's heart was light as he hurried back to his own camp. They were to be friends with their nearest neighbor, after all. The other boys were equally pleased when they learned what Merrithew had said.

"I'm sorry it took an accident to bring it about," remarked Budge. "But I'm mighty glad he's extended the olive branch; from now on it's up to us to make it as pleasant for him as we can."

Shortly after supper Percy disappeared. He was discovered sitting alone on a stump near the mill, killing mosquitoes, and penciling certain cabalistic marks on a block of paper.

"What 're you doing, Perce?" inquired Budge.

"Can't you see? Don't bother me! You'll make me lose my count. Forty-three!"

"The heat's gone to his head, Jim. Catch him and tie him to that pine before he becomes violent;

and I'll make another trip after Doc Melvin."

"I suppose I've got to explain," said Percy, resignedly. "You common intellects have little sympathy with the truly scientific mind. I'm conducting an important experiment. It's my theory that the mosquito, being endowed with short wings, has a limited radius of operation. In other words, he sticks about one spot, and keeps the home fires burning. Hence there's a definite number of him in any single place. If I kill all that stay round this stump, I can sit here in comfort. I'm trying to figure how many there are to the square yard. Now get out and don't bother me any more! Forty-four!"

"Good for you, Perce!" exclaimed Budge. "Keep at it! When you've established your dead line let me know, and I'll come into the magic circle and sit

down with you."

They strolled over to the mill to talk with Briggs and Doggett, leaving Percy killing and counting. Some minutes later they came back, the sawyer with them. Percy was in the cabin, anointing his neck and wrists with witch hazel.

"How about that theory, Sir Isaac Newton?"

"Experiment unsatisfactory," returned Percy. "Radius of operation of subject wider than anticipated; in fact, apparently limitless. I stopped at one hundred and nineteen, with more round me than when I started. Theory's all right, only it doesn't work!"

"I've heard of other theories that had the same

trouble," was Jim's comment.

"You'll get vaccinated after a while," said Briggs.
"I've known of choppers on low land being driven almost crazy. By and by, after they've been bitten up in good shape, they seem to grow immune."

"Tired, Throppy?" inquired Budge.

"Some. But it's a healthy tired. I'll sleep it off."

"This life's just as I thought it 'd be," said Budge. "We'll probably find it a little quiet and dull. For excitement, a saw-tooth 'll break occasionally; or Perce 'll stick a splinter into his finger or get bitten by a mosquito. In a place like this everybody minds his own business. But I'd like to know why those two men who contracted with father threw up the job."

"Some of these choppers and teamsters might be able to tell us," observed Jim. "They act to me as if

they knew something we don't know."

"They probably know a lot of things," said Budge.

"I don't mean that. They act in a peculiar way. Every now and then, when they thought we weren't looking, I've caught 'em winking and grinning at one another."

"Perhaps later on we'll find out the reason," said Budge.

In Grannitt's office that night the smoky lamp was burning.

"Well, Ches," inquired the lawyer, "when are you

going to start your fireworks?"

"Right away," replied Legore. "Guess I'll drop round to the mill to-morrer an' pretend to dicker with 'em. I'll make 'em an offer; but it 'll be so low they won't take it, an' I don't want 'em to. They've put their heads into the trap too far to pull 'em out, an' now they're goin' to get it in the neck."

#### VI

#### UNMASKED

THE next day was Friday. Before breakfast Budge, Jim, and Percy went down for their customary dip in the lake, while Throppy made an early call on his patient. He found that the hermit had passed a fairly easy night, though his feet still caused him considerable discomfort.

"I've nothing to complain of," said Merrithew.

"Might be a sight worse off."

Throppy prepared breakfast, and shared it with his charge.

"Now," said the latter, "I'd like to see Mr. Lane a few minutes, if he can spare the time. Alone, please!"

Roger came over. He started to apologize for his abruptness at their first interview; but Merrithew checked him.

"Never mind about that! It was a mistake anybody might make. Besides, you more than squared matters yesterday. Guess I was a little too hard on you boys. I don't like to see those trees come down; but it can't be helped. Somebody else would cut 'em, if you didn't. And I know the money you get 'll be

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put to a good use. Now I want to ask you something about Mr. Stevens. His lungs are weak, aren't they?"

"Yes," acknowledged Budge, reluctantly.

"I thought so. Suppose he'd be willing to take a woods tonic, if I recommended it? It can't hurt him,

and I've known of its doing a heap of good."

"I'm sure he'd be glad to take anything that would help him; you don't realize how much it 'd mean to the rest of us to have him get well. What is the

remedy?"

"Break off fresh hemlock boughs every morning, steep 'em, and let him take a drink of the liquid two or three times a day. It's the bitterest stuff you ever tasted; but you'll find that it 'll help his appetite, and that he'll begin to pick up in other ways. It's done wonders in several cases I've known of."

"Sounds good to me," said Budge. "You can put it up to him, when he comes over this noon."

"Trouble, Cap'n!" remarked Briggs, on Lane's

return to the mill.

"What's that?"

"Brook's dryin' up! We've got to draw our water from somewhere else."

"What are we going to do?"

"Lengthen the pipe and take our supply from the lake. It's less than a thousand feet off; and it isn't much lower than the pool we're drawin' from now. We can couple on the little engine and pump packed

away in those boxes, and then we won't have to worry."

Budge accepted the situation.

"Let's figure how much extra pipe we need, and I'll run up to Kimball's on my wheel and 'phone to Parcherville for it. They can send it out on the truck this afternoon."

A quick survey, made by Roger and his mentor, showed what was required.

"Six hundred feet more 'll do the trick," decided

Briggs.

The mill shut down a half hour early that noon to give time for tightening a loose belt. The last log was a small one. In going through it the saw wabbled, so that Briggs had to back up and try again.

"What's the matter?" asked Jim.

"Sliver," returned the sawyer. "It's the soft, slippery inside bark of sapling pine, and this's the month it bothers. Rolls down the side of the saw and makes it 'snake.' It won't trouble us much longer."

While Throppy was getting Merrithew's dinner, the hermit broached the subject of his remedy.

"You need a tonic," he declared.

Then he extolled the virtues of the drink to be made by steeping hemlock. Throppy was not enthusiastic, but to please his patient consented to bring some fresh boughs the next morning.

After dinner the crew took their usual siesta about

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Pronounced with the "i" long.

### UNMASKED

the clearing. Maliber's hound Jack began snuffing and digging excitedly under the slab-pile beside the mill.

"Woodchuck," guessed his owner.

Everybody watched.

"Last spring I helped set a mill in New Hamp-shire," said Doggett. "When we dug the first post hole, at two feet deep we broke into a burrow and came plump on a chuck just waking from his winter sleep. My boy's got him now."

Jack was half under the pile, making the dirt fly. Suddenly he backed out, ki-yi-ing, followed by a bristling, brownish ball. It uncoiled into a small animal, which started on a waddling run for the

woods.

"Porcupine!" rose the general shout.

McAuliffe seized an ax.

"I'll cook his goose!"

His chum, Jerry Ladd, caught his arm.

"Let him go, Gordon! He's won his life from the dog."

While they were struggling, the beast escaped. Jack ran whimpering to his master, his bleeding nose stuck full of quills.

"Poor fellow!" comforted Maliber.

Clutching the hound by the scruff of the neck, he held him firmly between his knees.

"Bring a pair of pincers, Louis!" he ordered.

The operation promised to be long and painful. But Briggs intervened.

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"Hold on a minute! I know a better way than

that. Anybody got some scissors?"

Percy brought a pair from the boys' cabin. While the Frenchman kept Jack's head motionless, Briggs snipped off a quill halfway from its end. Then he easily pulled it out with his fingers. He repeated the process, until the hound's nose was entirely free from the painful darts.

"Simple enough!" he explained. "A porcupine quill's hollow. Let out the air and it flattens and loses its stiffness. After that the barb doesn't stick."

It was half past twelve. Percy pulled the whistle wire. The shriek of the escaping steam had not ceased echoing when an open wagon, drawn by a sorrel horse and containing a single occupant, appeared at the end of the wood road. The driver was a stout, red-faced man in a brownish suit; Jim remembered seeing him at Barham Four Corners on the day of their arrival. As he drove past the brow, Spurling nodded, but the stranger did not return the greeting. Stopping his horse not far from the boiler, he cast a long, scowling look about the mill and clearing.

Jim saw McAuliffe, his face on the broad grin, nudge Ladd. Something was up. What? He did

not have to wait long to find out.

"Who's the boss here?" demanded the newcomer. His surly manner and the air of authority with which he spoke, together with the fact that he had not troubled to reply to Jim's greeting, woke in Spurling a feeling of strong repulsion.

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"If he hasn't any politeness to waste on me, I've none to waste on him," he determined.

Striking his rolling-hook into a log, he started it toward the carriage. At this deliberate disregard of his inquiry the flush on the man's face deepened to a dull, angry beet red. Percy, who had been dragging slabs down the shoot, and so had missed this futile passage between his mate and the stranger, turned just in time to hear the latter repeat his question:

"I asked who was boss here!"

The tone in which the words were uttered did not impress young Whittington any more favorably than they had impressed Jim. He jerked his thumb toward the pit.

"There's your man!" he replied, curtly.

Starting up his horse, the visitor drove round the front end of the boiler, and came upon Budge receiving boards from the hands of Tug Prince. For a moment the two eyed each other in silence.

"Are you Roger Lane?"

The question was shot out like a bullet; and it brought back a reply, equally short and direct.

"That's my name!"

The rumble of the machinery ceased. Briggs had discovered that another belt needed tightening. The sudden lull gave all an opportunity to hear the conversation between Budge and his interlocutor. Choppers and teamsters stood waiting with grins of anticipation. The stranger knit his brows and frowned.

"Well, I'm Legore, H. Chesley Legore," said he, overbearingly.

If he expected the announcement to have any particular effect on his hearer, he was disappointed. Budge refused to be impressed.

"Yes," he said.

Somebody smothered a snicker. Legore's temper was rising; but he restrained himself and tried another tack.

"I've handled about all the lumber that's been cut in this town for a good many years, an' I've come to see if I can't make a deal with you to take this lot off your hands."

Budge added an inch-and-a-quarter board to the pile on the rigging to the left. He shook his head.

"It's too late now for us to try to dicker, Mr. Legore. We're started in good shape and we intend to see the thing through. Besides, I don't think you'd be willing to give us anything near what we'd want. You couldn't come to terms with my father."

Impatiently the lumberman flicked the wagon wheel with his whip. He was not used to being thwarted. He tried again.

"There's a lot o' risks in this business. You're liable to find it pretty expensive, before you wind up. When you've learned more about it, p'r'aps you'll be readier to listen to reason."

"We'll take our chances," returned Budge, shortly. He did not relish Legore's patronizing tone.

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"Who's workin' for you here, anyway?" continued the lumberman.

With cool insolence he ran his eye over the scattered crew, noting them one by one. His hostile stare evidently made some of the men uneasy; they colored and looked away. Only McAuliffe met his gaze evenly. Legore's eyes had a malignant twinkle as he fixed them again on Budge.

"Ye-es," he pondered. "I see! But it's one thing to git a crowd together in the summertime an' another to hold 'em. I've always found it so."

Budge was growing tired of the conversation. He turned away and hailed the sawyer.

"How long before you'll be ready to start again, Ote?"

Under Legore's sunburnt skin the veins purpled slowly. He did not relish being treated in this cavalier fashion. His lips drew away from his teeth; his bulldog jaw pushed forward.

"You college fellers think you know it all," he sneered. "I've tried to use ye fair an' right; but you don't seem to appreciate it. But you just store this away in your brain box: There's more ways to kill a cat than by chokin' her to death with cream."

Budge's temper, always quick to flare up, got out of hand for a moment. He paid Legore back in kind.

"I guess you're right, when the cream's skim milk, and sour at that."

Roused to fury by this unexpected retort, the lumberman threw discretion to the winds.

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"I'll teach you to sass me, you young shrimp!" he roared, his tones husky with rage. "Before you butted in I had your father pinched just like that!"

He snapped his thumb and forefinger. His voice rose to a bull-like bellow. He was working himself up into a passion, while the boys regarded him with amazement.

"You hear me! I'll show you, sonny! It 'll be a sorry day for you an' your crowd when you first struck Barham! Oh yes! You'll always remember H. C. Legore! I'm the perfesser that 'll teach you some things you don't learn from books!"

He swept his arm round with a gesture of owner-

ship.

"This is my lumber—see? An' this 'll be my mill! Before the end o' the summer I'm goin' to own every-

thing in sight. Mark that!"

Smarting with discomfiture, he slashed his sorrel, turned his wagon short, and started past the boiler on the run. His right wheel collided with a high stump, and he came to an abrupt stop, almost upsetting. To avoid the obstacle, he whirled to the left, coming close to Jim, who was standing on the brow. The sight of Spurling's calm face only inflamed his fury.

"Git out o' my way," he snarled, "or I'll give you

a taste o' this whip!"

He half raised his weapon. Jim's easy pose stiffened.

"Better not," he warned, quietly.

Legore reconsidered, and the blow never fell.

#### UNMASKED

"You're the king pin o' this bunch o' trouble makers," he growled. "What you need is a good lickin.' I've half a mind to hop out o' this wagon an' give ye one now. I would if you didn't have that rollin'-hook!"

Three seconds later the hook dropped fifty feet away among the pines. Jim smiled; he stood easily, waiting. Legore looked for a moment at his well-poised, strongly knit figure. Budge came round the end of the boiler, and Briggs started out of the mill. Their approach gave the wrathful lumberman an excuse for not carrying out his threat.

"I'm not fool enough to tackle the hull caboodle o' ye! You'd all be on my back, if I gave ye half a chance. That lickin' 'll keep. You an' I were made to have trouble with each other. I'll settle with ye later on!"

He lifted the reins.

"Hold on a minute, Mr. Legore," said Jim, and there was iron in his voice. "You've had your say, and now I'm going to have mine. You've come on here without being invited, and you've abused and threatened us without any reason. We're doing nothing wrong. We're perfectly within our rights in contracting to saw this lumber; and we're not going to stop until we're through. I've just one thing to say to you. Get off this lot, and stay off! I'll give you two minutes to leave. If I ever catch you on here again, I'll throw you off!"

A red tide surged up over Legore's face until the

blood-vessels seemed surcharged almost to the point of bursting. Then the flood receded, leaving him

almost pale. His voice was cold with fury.

"You're too small fry for me to fool with now," he ground out, chokingly. "You may not see me here again, an' then you may; but you'll hear from me an' you'll feel me. Before I get through I'll break the hull tribe o' ye!"

Cutting the sorrel viciously with his whip, he rattled at a gallop out through the wood road.

#### VII

#### THUNDER AND LIGHTNING

THE boys looked at one another silently, as they listened to the dying rattle of Legore's wagon. Ten minutes had not elapsed since he had entered the clearing; but that brief space had sufficed to give an entirely new aspect to their summer at Barham. The choppers and teamsters dispersed to their respective tasks, their talk and laughter growing louder the further they got from the mill. An outburst from McAuliffe grated with particular unpleasantness on Budge's ears.

"Pretty ugly, wasn't he?" said Percy. "Acted as if he thought he owned the earth, or at least that part

of it inside the Barham line."

Budge's face was crimson, and there was a deter-

mined sparkle in his eye.

"If Mr. H. C. Legore thinks he can scare us off, he's barking up the wrong tree," he remarked. "He'll find that bluff and bulldozing don't cut much ice here! Jim handed it to him straight and I'm glad he did. From now on, he wants to keep away from the Peavey lot."

"What d'you suppose he'll try to do?"

"His worst, whatever that may be. He'll hang to his grudge, like a bulldog gnawing a bone; and he'll bother us all he can. I've seen men like him before. Well, we'll go ahead and mind our own business, and expect him to mind his."

The mill crew felt sober as they turned to resume their duties. Their unexpected visitor had put a decided damper on their spirits. The next three months promised to be not so quiet and pleasant, after

all.

"I like to be on good terms with everybody," said Budge, "but I don't propose to let a man of that sort use me for a door mat. Come on! Let's get to work and forget him! No sense in letting him break up any more of our afternoon."

"Jim," remarked Briggs, as he grasped his lever,

"how'd you like to learn to saw?"

"Guess I've got my hands full rolling!"

"No, you haven't. I've been keeping an eye on you and I've never seen a raw recruit juggle logs any better. We'll turn you into a first-class millman before the summer's over."

"Don't you think I'd make a good sawyer," asked Lane.

"No, Roger, you wouldn't," replied Briggs, bluntly. "And I'll tell you why. You're geared too high and you're liable to fly off the handle. Jim has as much temper as you have; but he keeps it under, and you don't—always. He's got nerve, and you've got nerves. That little final 's' makes all the difference

#### THUNDER AND LIGHTNING

in the world. He's not so slow, either; when there's any need, I'll guarantee he can act quick enough. Legore would have found that out if he had hung

round here a minute or so longer."

"Don't blush, Jim," counseled Budge. "He never means more than half what he says. Well, Ote, my nose is out of joint; just the same, I'm inclined to think you're at least three-quarters right. It's a good idea for Jim to learn. A man in a mill can't know how to do too many things."

"Correct!" approved the sawyer. "If anybody's taken sick or gets hurt, it sometimes means a shifting about of the whole crew. Better let 'Gene freshen you up a bit on marking. Then at a pinch you could

fit in there."

During the next two hours between intervals of sawing Briggs found Jim an apt pupil. The college boy watched and listened keenly, throwing in an occasional question. Admiringly he noted the skill with which the older man controlled the operation of

the whirling steel disk.

"By good rights," said Briggs, "a sawyer should be a tall man with a long reach; they're not always made that way, but it's a mighty handy build to have. He ought to be cool and use judgment, and keep a sharp watch over everything that's going on in the mill. The number of feet turned out in a day depends principally on him, for he can quicken up or slow down the whole crew by the way he handles the carriage. He must look out and not 'snub' the saw—

that is, he musn't crowd it too hard or jump it into the cut. Its sound and the feel of the lever tell him what to do; by and by it gets to be a kind of second nature with him and he acts from instinct. Remember this: There may be a lot of good ways to do a thing, but there's only one best way; and that's the way you want to learn, not only in mill work, but in everything else."

"That saw's a pretty dangerous thing, isn't it?"

said Jim.

"It is if a man doesn't watch sharp. The sawyer's got to be alive all the time. A single slip might cost him his life. With those teeth going round seven hundred times a minute, whatever happens, happens quick. I've known of some bad accidents, where men have fallen upon saws or have had their clothing caught by them. Then there's the danger from broken logs. I've seen a saw throw a log clean through the end of a mill. One thing you car. put down good and solid—the sawyer's berth is no place for a man who drinks."

At about three o'clock the truck arrived from Parcherville with the extra six hundred feet of supply pipe. As the water in the boiler was getting low Budge judged it better to shut down until connections could be made with the lake. It took the rest of the working day to do this and to install the pump and little engine; but before Percy banked his fire for the night everything was in good running order. The engine and pump also gave them additional pro-

#### THUNDER AND LIGHTNING

tection against fire; for by means of a length of rubber hose they could now wet down the ground for almost a hundred feet and throw a stream on any part of the plant.

The other camps for those of the men and horses that were to stop near the mill were now completed and the little settlement on the Peavey lot assumed a

more lively aspect.

That night, after an early supper, Budge, Percy, and Jim decided to go fishing on the lake. Pending the construction of their own boat, with Jim as master builder, they had arranged to have the use of a flat-bottomed, nondescript craft belonging to Joshua Kimball. This battered skiff possessed a single pair of oars. In the forward thwart was a hole through which could be stepped a movable mast, carrying a ragged spritsail. The outside of the boat had originally been painted; but time and rough usage had combined to remove all but a few flakes of an indistinguishable color. To crown all, the craft leaked badly.

But these disadvantages in no wise cooled the ardor of the enthusiastic fishermen. Jim in particular was eager to get afloat once more. Most of the water aboard was bailed out by means of an empty baked-bean can and the three embarked. Briggs and Doggett had strolled down to see them

set forth.

"Keep your eye peeled for squalls," cautioned the sawyer. "The wind on these mountain lakes is

liable to be puffy, and that cloud bank in the west looks

as if a thunderstorm was making up."

The remembrance of long hours of battling with high seas and strong winds off Tarpaulin came to Jim's mind. He smiled as he stepped the mast and passed the sheet aft to Budge.

"We'll be careful," he responded.

Had a similar warning been given him three hours later he would not have smiled.

A gentle breeze filled the tattered sail and fanned the aged craft away from the beach. The boys busied themselves with their fishing tackle.

"Good luck!" was Briggs's farewell as he and

Doggett turned back toward their cabin.

Throppy had not joined the fishing party. Three were all the boat would safely hold; moreover, his inclinations and what he felt to be his duty drew him to Merrithew's cabin.

The hermit's condition was improving rapidly. The swelling and bruises were disappearing, and he now experienced little pain. With Throppy's help he was able to rise from his bunk and hobble across the floor.

"I'll cheat the doctor for a long time yet," said he. "A man who's lived a healthy, quiet life in the open recovers fast, like an animal or an Indian. You'll find it so. The woods and that tonic 'll put you on your feet long before the end of the summer."

Throppy turned away to hide the wry face he could not help making; the idea of the hemlock drink was

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not pleasant to him. To change the subject, he told Merrithew about Legore's visit. The hermit's features darkened.

"I know him, root and branch. He's the trickiest, ugliest customer in the town, a regular double-twisted scalawag. When he starts in on anything, he intends to carry it through by hook or crook, and it's generally by crook. You boys 'll have to look out for yourselves and not give him any chance to get the upper hand of you. Ever play checkers?"

"A little."

"There's a board in that drawer. What do you say to a game?"

They played; and Merrithew was easily the win-

ner.

"I'm an older hand at this than you are," he said.
"Let me show you a few moves!"

Soon they were deep in the principles of the game. Meanwhile, Budge, Jim, and Percy had entirely forgotten the existence of the sawmill and the Peavey lot. They had three hand lines and a bamboo pole, from which swung a long-shanked hook baited with a large strip of salt pork.

"Here you are, Jim!" said Budge, passing him the rod. "Break the ice! Drop your hook alongside those pads! There ought to be a whopper under

'em."

Slowly the boat forged onward. The baited hook splashed near the edge of the large flat leaves. A rush, a flurry, a violent jerk that almost snapped the

bamboo out of Jim's hands. Down went the tip of the pole, as the line tautened and cut through the water toward the pads.

"Play him, Jim!" yelled Budge. "Steer him out into the lake, or he'll tangle the line up with the

stems, and you'll lose him!"

Thus exhorted, Jim gave a sudden pull. All at once the line came slack. The fish had evidently bitten off the end of the strip of pork without taking the hook. A rapidly moving ridge of water showed that he was rushing at it again.

"Keep cool, Jim!" exhorted Budge. "Slow up! You're yanking it away from him! Give him a

chance to take hold!"

Jim obeyed. Again the fish struck; this time he was hooked fast and his captor swung him in toward the boat. It was far from being scientific angling; for the line had no reel, but was made fast to the tip of the bamboo, which bent in an alarming manner.

"Steady, Jim, steady!" directed Budge.

The pickerel struck the side of the skiff and was hauled aboard, Budge helping with both hands to

drag him over the gunwale.

"Isn't he a whale?" exclaimed Percy, as their prize floundered in the bottom of the boat. "Two feet, if he's an inch! Can't weigh far from five pounds!"

Jim looked a bit disgusted.

"Five pounds!" he repeated. "Why, I've caught

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thousands of cod and hake and haddock heavier than that! I don't see anything about him to make a fuss over."

"That's all right, old man," laughed Budge. "Just the same, you'll have to acknowledge you were a bit excited when you were pulling the bait away from him so fast he couldn't keep up with it. It's about the first time I ever saw you lose your head. I'm glad you're human, after all."

For fifteen minutes they trolled along the edge of

the pads, but no other pickerel broke water.

"Let's cross to the opposite shore," proposed Budge. "Kimball told me there's a good ground

for white perch off that tall pine."

It was fully a mile and a half across the lake, now a beautiful sheet of rippling blue under the west wind. The hills and low mountains that hemmed it in were strewn with a rumpled carpet of light and dark green. The wall of cloud on the horizon had risen higher and grown blacker. The sun still lacked two hours of setting.

"Storm's coming, all right," said Percy.

"Yes," returned Budge, "we'll have to keep an eye on those clouds. We'll start back in good season,

so as not to get caught."

Sail and oars brought the skiff to the perch ground. Becalmed there in the shadow of the woods, they angled for a while without success. Percy at last grew tired.

"Guess those white perch are off on a holiday."

A few rods away a considerable brook emptied into the lake.

"Set me ashore, fellows?" he requested. "I'd like

to try the trout."

"Don't be gone more than half an hour, will you, Perce?" said Budge. "Remember that storm. We don't want to get a wetting if we can help it."

"I'll be back inside thirty minutes," rejoined

Percy.

Cutting a slender pole from a birch clump on the bank, he quickly fastened his line to it, and started up the stream. The others rowed back to the fishing

ground.

Good luck attended young Whittington from the start. The brook abounded in trout of all sizes. Before long he had eight beauties, each weighing between half and three-quarters of a pound. The rising clouds made it dark in the shadow of the woods and he began to think of returning to the boat.

A little farther on he spied a large pool with overhanging banks. At its head a fall plashed down.

"One more cast," thought Percy. "There should

be a big fellow here."

There was—also another of an unexpected kind. The skillfully flirted hook had barely touched the quick water below the fall when something grabbed it. Out came a pound trout!

Barely restraining a whoop of joy, Percy knelt on the bank to unhook his prize. As he added the trout to his string he became conscious of something be-

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hind him; he had heard no sound, but instinct made him look up. For a moment he stared in frozen panic.

Above him stood a huge, black animal, bigger and taller than a horse, with a tremendous nose and branching horns, a sullen, threatening apparition.

Alone in that dusky forest, the boy could hardly be blamed for the surge of terror that swept over him. Control of his limbs came back, and with it a prompting to seek safety in mad flight. He dropped his trout and rod. One leap carried him to a flat rock in midstream; a second brought him to the opposite bank. Taking to his heels, he ran down the brook at the top of his speed.

Behind him sounded a splash, an angry snort.

The animal was in pursuit.

Dodging trees, leaping over boulders, slipping, recovering himself, Percy almost flew down the bank of the stream. Fear set his pulses pounding; for an occasional snort behind told that the big brute was hot on his trail. He dared not think what might result, should he stumble.

The lake showed through the trunks; the shore was near. Percy summoned all his energies for a final spurt.

"Boys! Boys!" he shouted. "Row in for me!

Quick!"

He burst out of the undergrowth upon the narrow beach of pebbles. Jim and Budge, fifty feet away, angling listlessly, gazed at him in wonder. Percy

did not wait. Warned by a cracking of boughs behind him, he flung himself into the water and started to swim with all his might toward the boat.

Realizing that for some reason there was urgent need of getting him aboard as soon as possible, Jim snatched up the oars and began to row for the shore. Budge, glancing beyond his desperately swimming mate, saw the bushes parted by a long, heavy head with spreading antlers.

"It's the moose!" he exclaimed.

Percy was now close aboard, and Budge leaned over and caught him by the shoulder. When he looked again, the leafy wall was unbroken. The head had disappeared. Percy, angry and excited, was dragged over the gunwale.

"Wish I'd had my rifle with me," he sputtered. "Close time or no close time, I'd have taught that brute to mind his own business. I've run myself out of a year's growth. And then there's that string of trout! Gee! But that last fellow was a regular sockdologer!"

"It's always the biggest one that we lose," consoled Budge. "Cheer up! So long as you haven't brought him in, nobody can prove that you're not telling the truth."

"Look!" said Jim.

The wall of clouds had risen almost to the zenith, hiding the sun behind its ominous black barrier. Beyond the shelter of the trees the lake was scourged by sudden squalls, following one another in quick

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succession. A growl of thunder sounded in the west. The storm was not far off.

"Better start across?" asked Jim.
"Sure!" said Budge. "There's nothing to gain by waiting; and it won't be long before we hit the beach. The sail and oars 'll take us over flying."

"I'll row," volunteered Jim. "You handle the

sail."

The farther out into the lake they got, the stronger grew the wind. It came in sudden capfuls, smiting the ragged canvas with a fury that threatened to tear it from the fastenings. The rumble of the thunder was now almost continuous, and frequent lightning flashes began to split the clouds. Big raindrops spatted upon the roughening surface.

"We're in for it," remarked Budge.

Hardly had the words escaped his lips when down swooped a violent gust. The boat careened until the gunwale almost touched the water. Crack! The mast snapped off close above the thwart, and at the same instant the rotten sail ripped into shreds and streamed away to leeward.

"Clear away the wreck, Perce!" shouted Jim to Whittington, who was crouched in the bow. "Pitch the whole thing overboard! It's no good and we

don't want it dragging alongside."

Percy followed Jim's directions, and presently the ruins of mast and sail were floating astern. They were now in the center of the lake, fully three-quarters of a mile from their destination. The heavens

were filled with angry, inky clouds, rolling and heaving tumultuously. The rain fell in a drenching downpour. Now and again a bluish-white blaze of lightning was followed by a stunning thunderclap.

Even on the salt water the boys had never experienced so furious a tempest. They were running almost before the wind; and the high, ragged, foamy rollers frequently broke into the boat over her port quarter. Jim pulled his hardest, keeping a watchful eye astern. It took all his skill to prevent the clumsy craft from filling. He was both surprised and concerned at the height and violence of the seas.

"Bail, Budge, bail!" he exhorted.

Lane was working like a steam engine, but the water came in faster than he could throw it out. Enveloped in a dark, rainy mist, they could no longer see the shore. Even the blinding flashes of light, darting from the low clouds, revealed only a small area of the gale-smitten lake. Percy cowered in the bow. This was even worse than being chased by a moose!

Though Budge bailed his hardest, the water gained steadily. Several inches of it swashed to and fro in the bottom of the skiff, weighing her down. The lower she settled the more came in, making her harder to row. Soon she wallowed so deep that she was in actual danger of swamping.

Matters were looking serious. Where was the shore?

Between the thunderclaps Budge caught a low

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resonant murmur straight ahead. It became louder and deeper. Jim and Percy heard it, too.

"It's the wind in the pines!" cried Budge, joyfully. Through the mist loomed a black wall, with the waves dashing white at its foot.

"There's the beach! Good shot, Jim!"

A moment later the skiff struck bottom. Leaping out, they dragged her through the surf as high as they could. Lane took up the pickerel.

"Mustn't forget our dinner to-morrow!"

A few minutes later they were safe in camp, chang-

ing their wet clothes before a roaring fire.

"You don't know how glad I am to see you, boys," said Throppy. "I'll run over and tell Ote and 'Gene you're all right. We were getting pretty anxious

about you."

"We're thankful enough to be back safe and sound," said Jim. "At least, I am. I never rowed harder but once, and that was when Perce and I were blown off to Cashes last summer. She'd have swamped in two minutes more. Who'd have dreamed the sea would make up so high and quick on such a small lake! Ote was right to warn us. I've learned something to-night; next time I'll know better than to take any chances with fresh water."

There was a lull in the gale. Percy cocked his head

on one side and listened.

"I hear a hammering," said he. "Sounds as if somebody was pounding iron."

He opened the door just as the gale struck again

with redoubled fury. In swooped a blast, and out blew their kerosene lamp, leaving them in darkness. A shout of protest rose.

"Shut that door, Perce!" ordered Budge. "I guess you were brought up in a sawmill fast enough!"

Percy pulled the door to, while Jim found a match

and relighted the lamp.

"You must have been mistaken about that hammering," he said. "My ears are as good as yours, and I didn't hear anything. Guess 'twas the wind!"

"No," persisted Percy, stubbornly. "I'm sure I heard the ring of metal. Sounded as if somebody was striking the head of a drill with a sledge."

And they were unable to beat him out of his con-

viction.

#### VIII

#### TROUBLE BEGINS

SATURDAY dawned clear and beautiful. The rain ceased and the gale went down in the night and the blue morning sky was unflecked by a single cloud. The air was filled with the smell of the moist woods. There was no motion among the pine boughs, but their wet needles sparkled in the sun like myriads of diamonds.

After the boys had had their customary swim they bailed out the boat, pulled her up on the beach, and turned her over to dry.

"Badly strained, and needs calking and painting," was Jim's opinion. "She did well to bring us across last night. But she ought to have a thorough overhauling before we trust our lives in her again."

Budge arranged for Brad Martin to take his place in the pit that forenoon. He desired to run over to Parcherville on his motor cycle to do several errands, chief among which was the securing of five hundred dollars at the bank to meet the weekly pay roll and various other bills.

"Anything I can do in town for you fellows?" he asked.

"You might mail this for me," said Throppy.

While cleaning the chimney of the kerosene lamp a little before, he had been struck by an idea; as a result, he had written a letter, which he now handed to Budge.

"Of course I'll be glad to mail it," returned Budge; but why don't you drop it into the box at the end of

the road? It'll be just as safe there."

"I know that; but I'll gain a day if it's put into the office at Parcherville before noon."

"If you're as particular as all that, you must have something important on the string."

"I have."

And not a word more would Throppy vouchsafe regarding his epistle. He changed the subject.

"Where can I find some hemlock boughs?"

"Up where Maliber and Benoit are chopping. I heard Joe mention seeing a tree there yesterday. He'll show it to you."

Leaving Throppy sharpening his knife on a whetstone, Budge pushed his motor cycle out from under the shed near the cabin. The mill was in full blast and everything was running like oil. He could not repress a feeling of satisfaction as his eye noted approvingly each detail of the process that was transforming the rough, barky trunks into first-class lumber.

"Let Legore do his worst!" he thought. "We're fairly under way now, and I don't believe he can stop us."

A few minutes later he was speeding along the high-

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way toward Parcherville. About a mile from the mill his ear detected a rattle in his machine and he stopped to tighten a nut. Glancing into a pasture beside the road, he observed an irregular hollow a hundred yards distant, and he vaulted over the wall to investigate. The depression turned out to be an abandoned quarry, about two hundred feet long by fifty broad, and filled with water to within twenty feet of its top.

"The crowd 'll have to tramp out some night and look this over," thought Budge, as he returned to his wheel. "Twouldn't make a bad swimming hole!"

He did not stop again until he reached Parcherville. There he spent two busy hours. After drawing his money from the bank, he bargained with the owner of a large truck to have the seasoned boards hauled from the sticking ground to the railroad station at Edington, as soon as they were ready. The services of a lawyer were required to frame the contract; and to look out for his interests Budge employed a young attorney, Russell Lawton, whom the elder Lane had found able and trustworthy.

It was eleven o'clock before he started back on his machine. Meanwhile, two events in which he would have been deeply interested were occurring at different places in Barham.

Grannitt had been absent from town on the previous afternoon and evening, and, though Legore, after being worsted in his encounter at the Peavey lot,

had endeavored to see his attorney on Friday, it was not until the next forenoon that the two met in the lawyer's office. The lumberman's anger still burned red against Lane and his associates, and he was, if anything, more determined than ever to best them by fair means or foul; but his temper was now under control and he and Grannitt were coolly discussing the quickest methods of ruining the boys' enterprise and driving them out of town.

"They're an easy bunch to work for," said Legore. "Anything goes over there. I could see that the crowd were soldierin' on their jobs. Lane's money must feel pretty good to 'em. Sorry to break up a soft thing, but I've got to do it. We won't mention any names; but somethin' tells me part o' that gang won't be workin' much longer on the Peavey lot."

He winked at Grannitt.

"When you an' I jine drives, we've ways o' reachin' men that it mightn't be well to say too much about. Just between us I've the feelin' that sparks are liable to fly in that mill this very mornin'."

The lawyer put up his hand in a gesture that for-

bade further confidences.

"That 'll do, Ches! You know that there are some things it's better for me not to be told about. But we both know what's going to happen there early next week. I saw Marcellus Drinkwater in Parcherville yesterday, and made all the arrangements. Everything will be strictly legal. I think that our young friends are in for the surprise of their lives."

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"They'll have another sort o' surprise before then," said Legore, vindictively, "an' p'r'aps two or three. I want to git in a few licks on my own account before the thing winds up. I've no love for that red-headed feller; but the black-haired one made talk to me that I don't intend to take from any livin' man. Leastwise, not without payin' good measure back."

"That's a matter between you and him," said Grannitt. "I don't mix in any personal rows." They fell into quiet, confidential talk.

Up on the Peavey lot matters had run on smoothly until about half past ten. Following Maliber's directions, Throppy had cut a generous armful of hemlock boughs and had taken them over to Merrithew's cabin. There he steeped them over a hot fire and poured some of the resulting decoction into a bowl. When this cooled sufficiently, he gratified the hermit by taking as much of it as he could swallow.

"I know it doesn't taste very good at first," said Merrithew. "But, as a favor to me, I want you to try it for a week or so and see if it doesn't improve your appetite. I wouldn't ask you to do this if I didn't know how much it has helped others."

Throppy consented.

"I guess I can stand it a few days. I suppose the worse it tastes the more it helps you."

For the first time in their acquaintance the hermit smiled.

"Be honest with yourself and let me know how you feel at the end of a fortnight."

On his way back to his own cabin Throppy stopped at the mill. Briggs in his spare moments was giving

advice to both Percy and Jim.

"Throw in your wood when the saw isn't in the cut," he counseled Whittington. "Either when the carriage is being jigged back or the log is being put on. Keep your fire level, so as to get an even heat."

Throppy watched. As the saw struck the butt it slowed down. All the machinery followed suit, shaftings, belts, flywheel, and engine. The balls on the governor dropped, opening the valve and letting in more steam, which exhausted itself with a heavy puffing into the stack. As the cleft trunk passed beyond the saw and the carriage slid back, the puffing grew quicker and softer, until it almost died away.

Jim rolled on a new log.

"Here's one from a tree that was felled this morning," he exclaimed.

The saw started through it. Suddenly there rose a hideous grating and shrieking. A stream of red sparks flew from the cut. Briggs moved his lever like a flash, and the din ceased as the carriage slid back and came to a standstill. Stopping the saw, he leaned over it anxiously.

"Half a dozen teeth gone, and the shoulders with 'em," he said, as he straightened up from his inspection. "Now let's see what did it!"

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The whole mill crew gathered round the log and

the partly sawed slab was chopped away.

"It's a spike!" exclaimed Briggs. "And cut almost through! No wonder it took those six teeth and shoulders! Looks like a new one, too. Wonder how long it's been in the wood!"

With the point of his knife blade he cut and dug round the head of the offending piece of iron. As he

approached a decision his face sobered.

"Boys," said he at last, "this spike was driven into the tree not more than two or three days ago at the outside."

They glanced at one another. The same suspicion was in the minds of all. Doggett gave it voice.

"Looks to me as if the man who hammered it in put it there on purpose to make trouble."

Percy struck his hands together.

"What about that pounding I was sure I heard last night!"

"You were right," confessed Jim.

Briggs and Doggett looked at them in wonder.

Percy explained.

"Plain as the nose on your face," almost shouted the sawyer. "Somebody went out last night into the choppers' clearing, when the wind was blowing so hard that he thought any other noise wouldn't be heard, and drove that into a tree with the idea of causing all the damage he could. The question is, who did it?"

Again glances were exchanged. This was a serious

matter. Nobody cared to venture any speculation; but in each mind was the same thought as to the man behind it all—Legore.

"Let's look these other logs over," proposed

Briggs. "That spike may not be the only one."

He was right. A careful examination of the trunks on the stringers disclosed two more spikes, precisely like the first. They had been driven through the bark, and the traces of their entrance so carefully obliterated as to be almost invisible.

"Intended to do a clean job," said Briggs. "Well, he's drawn first blood. That saw's got to go back to the manufacturers to be fixed up. Lucky we've another!"

The damaged steel disk was taken off the arbor, and the spare one put on. Briggs filed its teeth. No more boards were sawed that forenoon.

Shortly after the whistle blew, the exhaust of Budge's motor cycle was heard, and soon he shot into the clearing. He looked serious on learning about

the spike.

"I don't think so much of the injury to the saw," said he, "although it 'll cost us considerable money. But there's no doubt the thing was done in cold blood, and I'm afraid by one of our own men. What bothers me most is to feel that we've a traitor in camp."

He was talking with Briggs, Jim, and Percy, who formed a little group out of earshot of the local men. "Who do you s'pose did it?" asked Percy.

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"Can't tell. Let's not say anything more about that now. We'll go over the whole thing when we're alone to night."

"Better order an extra saw, hadn't you?" said

Briggs.

"I'll phone the telegraph office at Parcherville right after dinner, and wire the makers to express one to us as quick as they can get it here. This same thing may happen again, and we can't afford to shut down the mill. The only thing to do now is to look over every log and make sure it hasn't been tampered with. That means a lot more work for Jim, but I don't see any help for it."

At noon there was a sense of restraint about the plant. Choppers and teamsters inspected the spikes and ate their dinners in glum silence. Rightly or wrongly, each man seemed to feel that the finger of suspicion was pointing at him. Conscious of the atmosphere of unpleasantness that was being created and realizing the hard feeling it might develop, the boys did their best to bring about a better state of affairs.

Percy related his experience with the moose. He brought out his twenty-two, fastened up a paper target on a pine, and soon had a lively shooting match under way.

"If I'd only had this rifle with me last night," said he, "I'd have given that moose something to remem-

ber me by."

Apparently he spoke the truth, for he scored more

bull's eyes than any of his rivals. By whistle-time the tension had eased up a bit, though the mental attitude of the crew could hardly have been termed hilarious. They dispersed rather soberly to their duties and Percy returned to his boiler.

"What make this fire so dead!" he exclaimed, after a half hour of throwing in slabs. "It's never been so

low as this before."

"Rain to-morrow," said Doggett. "There's no draught the day before or after a storm."

The new saw worked well, but Percy found it hard that afternoon to hold the steam much above eighty pounds, the pressure needed to keep everything run-

ning in good shape.

At closing time Budge paid off his crew for their first week's work. Then he received an unpleasant surprise. Two choppers, Huston and Bridge, the loader, Jensen, and his cousin, Chris Bremer, the yardman, notified him that they would not be back on Monday morning.

"What's the trouble, boys?" asked Budge. "Aren't

you getting pay enough?"

"No fault to find that way," replied Huston. "Just changed our minds about working. That's all."

And that was all that Budge could get out of him or any of the others regarding their reasons for leaving. Their departure put him in a serious dilemma. It had been hard enough to get his present force together. Where was he to find new men?

Before supper Percy and Throppy went up to

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Joshua Kimball's and brought back a pot of baked beans, a loaf of brown bread, and several dozen doughnuts. Mrs. Kimball was a first-class cook, and the food engaged from her, together with what they could prepare for themselves, assured the boys of good living. This was fortunate, for their appetites had already begun to improve.

That night Briggs and Doggett came over to the boys' cabin and the incident of the spikes was can-

vassed from all angles.

"Of course what we say in here doesn't go outside," said Budge. "I'm going to talk plain. I don't like that McAuliffe. He's grouchy and unpleasant, a regular chronic grumbler; and I shouldn't be surprised, strictly between us, if he could shed a little light on those spikes, if he was so disposed."

"I've had the same feeling," said Jim. "Some-

thing about him goes against my grain."

"I don't want to discourage you, Roger," said Briggs, "but two or three of those other men may drop out from under you before Monday morning. You remember that Legore said we might not see him, but we'd feel him. I believe this is some of his underhanded work."

"I'm afraid you're right, Ote," replied Budge. "Still, we won't borrow trouble till Monday morning comes. Now this is Saturday night, and we've had a busy week. Let's forget the unpleasantness that's past and not worry about any that may be coming, but just have a real good time."

Everybody agreed. Throppy's violin and Jim's flute were pressed into service. All the boys were good singers, while Briggs's tenor and Doggett's bass combined to swell the chorus. The entertainment was varied by an occasional selection on a small graphophone they had brought. Percy was looking over the records. Finally he found what he wanted.

"Here's something I'd like somebody else to hear. Don't look at it, fellows, till I get back."

He ran over to the little camp occupied by Maliber and Benoit, and returned, dragging Joe's hound by the scruff of the neck. Shutting the door carefully, so that Jack could not retreat, he put the record on the machine. It was the rendering of a dog fight. At its close Jack was permitted to escape with his tail between his legs. Two rousing stanzas of "Dixie," accompanied by the graphophone, brought the evening to a close.

Sunday was stormy, as Briggs had foretold it would be. The rain came down in torrents, making the woods and countryside all but impassable. The boys spent most of the time in camp, reading and writing letters.

The next day was a busy one for Budge and his motor cycle. Briggs again proved to be a true prophet, for beside the four who had already given notice of their intention to leave, another chopper, Corydon Stokes, and the general-utility man, Brad Martin, also failed to appear. That left the crew six

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short. Under these conditions it seemed better not to attempt to run the mill. Jim and Percy each secured a horse and buggy and started out to help Budge drum up a half dozen new recruits. The remainder of the mill force was set to work chopping, loading, and piling logs.

It was almost dark when the boys returned to camp, but the six men had been secured. Alec Parsons and Dick Henderson had been hired as choppers instead of Huston and Bridge, while Fred Beverage was taken on in place of Corydon Stokes. Rodney Graff for all-round man, Peter Simmons as loader, and Henry Ireson for yardman were the other acquisitions.

"You've done well, boys," was Briggs's greeting, when he learned of their success. "Only, I wish we knew whether the man who drove those spikes is among the six who left or is still with us."

Tuesday the mill started again, and the forenoon passed without any particular incident. Milburn's meat cart drove into the clearing at nine on its weekly call, and Budge purchased a fine pork roast, which he left wrapped up on the table in the cabin, to be put into the oven early in the afternoon. Percy pulled the whistle as usual at half past eleven, and he and Jim and Budge strolled over to camp.

"Don't eat too hearty this noon, fellows," warned Budge. "For supper we're going to have the juiciest,

tenderest roast you ever tasted."

The cabin door was slightly ajar; Throppy had not

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yet returned from Merrithew's. The boys stepped inside to wash up.

"Where's that pork, Budge?" asked Percy.

"I put it on the table, but it isn't there now. Throppy must have come in and stowed it away somewhere."

They hunted in every possible place, but no roast.

"Isn't that a grease spot on the floor?" said Jim.

"Looks like it; and there's some marks on the doorstep."

Following a faint trail in the needles, Jim went round to the rear of the cabin.

"Come out here a minute," he called.

The others obeyed. Jim pointed to some cleanly gnawed bones.

"Jack's squared accounts with us for dragging him in to listen to that dog-fight record Saturday night."

"When I buy another roast I'll put it into the oven

and shut the door," said Budge.

That noon Tug Prince and Percy had a wrestling match, in which Percy came out on top. He had taken special interest in this branch of gymnastics during the first year in college, and, while the country lad was stronger, he did not have the skill of his carefully trained antagonist. Even at that Percy found him no easy proposition, and had to acknowledge, when the bout was over, that he had met a foeman fully worthy of his steel.

Rodney Graff, the new all-round man, alert, pleas-

#### TROUBLE BEGINS

ant, and obliging, a marked contrast to the sulky McAuliffe, had been sent out to help load the scoots.

"I like him," said Budge. "He doesn't know much about the work, but he's willing to learn. He never growls and he never shirks."

"I like him, too," said Jim. "Where did you find

him?"

"At Holway & Benner's. He'd heard about our mill, and so blew into town. He may be a tramp, but he's a good one. I only hope he'll stick."

The afternoon work was an hour advanced when Budge, at an interval in the sawing, noticed that the axes were no longer ringing through the pines.

"Hulloo!" he exclaimed. "What's up? Wonder

why they're resting so long!"

A man wearing a slouch hat came sauntering out of one of the scoot roads. He was lank and wiry; his sun-browned face was slightly lantern-jawed; he had a quizzical eye, and a straggling mustache; and Budge noted with disapproval that he was chewing tobacco. He glanced about the mill without saying anything. Budge gave him no further attention; he was interested to know why the chopping stopped.

"Guess I'd better go out and see what the matter is," said he to Doggett. "They're not so far ahead

of the mill that they can afford to loaf."

As he passed the stranger the man threw open his coat.

"P'r'aps you might like to look at this."

It was a silver star on the lapel of his vest. Budge gave it a casual glance.

"That's real pretty," he said. "How much did it

cost you?"

"Not so much as it's liable to cost you," drawled the man with a grin. "Better look again!"

Budge did, and his eyes opened. The star bore

two words:

"Deputy sheriff!"

#### IX

#### BEFORE THE JUDGE

A S Budge stared at the glittering badge an uneasy sense of coming trouble changed his jesting indifference to surprised attention.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

The grin on the stranger's leathery face widened provokingly as he drew a folded paper from inside his coat.

"I want to give you something you won't want. You're Roger Lane, aren't you?"

Budge nodded shortly. He did not like the other's

half-humorous, half-sneering manner.

"Thought so," continued the deputy. "Your hair's the shade of red I was told to look for. Well, here's a present for you from Judge Dilloway."

He pushed the paper into Roger's hand. Jim and Briggs abruptly stopped talking; Percy's cheerful whistle suddenly cut off; all faces were turned toward Budge and the stranger. Young Lane had unfolded the formidable-looking document, and was scanning its closely printed paragraphs with considerable bewilderment.

"What's this?" he asked at last. "I haven't robbed or murdered anybody."

The deputy smote himself a smart blow on the left

cheek and said something under his breath.

"I'd do murder every second of the day if I had to live out here among these mosquitoes," he remarked acidly. "No, I'm not charging you with killing anybody, but as to robbery, that's an entirely different matter; before we get through, it may take twelve good men and true of Madison County to decide it."

"What do you mean?"

The shriek of the saw had ceased and only the dull humming of the machinery broke the silence that hung over the mill. Everybody was listening. The newcomer spat upon the pine needles. He straightened his lank, lathy form to its fullest height and threw out his chest; he found the attention that he

was receiving decidedly agreeable.

"This is a writ of injunction, issued by Judge Horace Dilloway. The records in the Madison County Registry of Deeds at Parcherville show that nineteen years ago Maria Peavey borrowed five hundred dollars from Reuben Drinkwater and mortgaged this timber lot as security. There is nothing on the records to indicate that this loan was ever paid. H. Chesley Legore of Barham—p'r'aps you've heard of him—has bought up all the rights of the Drinkwater heirs under the mortgage, and has started to foreclose. Meanwhile he takes out this injunction. It's the voice of Judge Dilloway, saying, 'Stop!' Says the judge: 'Leave everything here just as it is

### BEFORE THE JUDGE

until the matter is settled. Don't strike a single clip with an ax, or make a scratch with a saw, or roll another log on the carriage, or cut an inch into that butt, or throw another stick into the firebox.' Them's the orders; break 'em at your peril! And here's my appointment as keeper to see that they're carried out."

He pulled another folded paper from his pocket.

"So you see, young man," said he to Budge, who stood gazing at him in stunned incredulity, "this star of mine amounts to something, after all. It may be a little thing, but it's big enough to put your whole plant out of business."

Again he spat on the needles. The blood ebbed from the boy's cheeks; the suddenness of the shock left him gasping for breath.

"But—but—" he stammered, "we can't stop now. We've only just started. It 'd ruin our summer's work."

"Sorry," returned the other, laconically, yet not without a trace of sympathy, "but law's law and orders is orders. You've got either to stop or go on; and you can't go on, that's sure. So I don't see what else you can do but stop."

"How long will it be before the thing can be settled?"

"Court doesn't sit again until September; so it 'll be at least ten weeks."

Ten weeks! Roger stood aghast. This sudden blow, tremendous, utterly unforeseen, had set their

carefully planned air castle tottering from its foundations. Briggs created a diversion.

"Guess I might's well take off another board," he

remarked, casually, pulling his lever.

The officer sprang forward, hand upraised in prohibition, lantern jaws working with excitement.

"Hold on there!" he shouted, angrily. "Didn't

you hear-?"

The long-drawn shriek of the saw drowned the remainder of his sentence. Presently the board dropped on the table and the sawyer jigged his carriage back. The deputy, boiling over with wrath, started into the mill toward Briggs.

"Better not come any further," warned the mel-

ancholy Doggett, reaching for a wrench.

Recovering his self-control, the man halted, a slow flush stealing over his brown face.

"I could make you smart for that, if I wanted to," he snapped. "You may know logs, but you don't know law. You'll find that it's got teeth, specially in Judge Dilloway's court."

Briggs smiled and started to move his lever again,

but Jim's restraining hand fell on his shoulder.

"That'll do, Ote," he cautioned. "Once is enough."

"You've got horse sense, young fellow," approved the deputy. "He'll be lucky if he doesn't find out that once is too much."

By this time Budge had pulled himself together. "We'll obey the law," said he, with an effort. "Shut her down!"

# BEFORE THE JUDGE

Percy, who had only half understood what was going on, stared at him in amazement.

"What's the joke?" he began.

"There's no joke."

One look at Roger's set face convinced the fireman.

"Shall I bank the fire or let it out?" he asked.

"Might as well let it out," volunteered the deputy.
"Chances are it won't be needed again this summer."
Percy considered.

"Guess I'll bank her."

"Suit yourself," returned the other, indifferently. The hum and rattle of the machinery ceased; with a final whirl the great saw went dead. Jim trigged his last log, and the board that Doggett had marked before laying down his chalk slid over the rolls into the pit. While the boiler was blowing off, Percy banked his fire with unusual care.

"I've a hunch these plates won't get cold before she steams up again," he muttered to himself.

Over the clearing brooded a stillness, strangely in contrast with the noise and activity of a half hour before. The men gathered in knots round the mill, talking seriously. McAuliffe's dark face wore an ill-concealed grin; Graff, the new man, was indignant, and did not hesitate to say so; he and McAuliffe were soon at loggerheads. Their heated argument reached Budge's ears.

"Listen to that," he said. "McAuliffe's growing grouchier and uglier every day. He seems to be actually glad we've got to shut down. I believe he's

a spy and worse for Legore. If we start again, I've decided not to take much more of his lip."

"I'd fire him so quick it 'd make his hair stand on

end," remarked Percy.

Withdrawing to their cabin with Ote and 'Gene, the boys held a council. Budge was rallying from the staggering blow dealt by the injunction. There was a lump in his throat and a suspicion of tears in his eyes, but they were tears of anger, not of weakness. Jim's jaw was set a trifle more sternly than usual.

"We're going to fight it out, aren't we, Budge?" he

inquired.

"Fight? Of course we'll fight! 'Twon't be long before those flywheels 'll be turning again. I believe this whole thing's just a bluff of Legore's; he's worked it up with that fishy-eyed Grannitt. If Maria Peavey ever borrowed any money on a mortgage, I'm sure she paid it back. Come on, Jim! Let's go up to Joshua Kimball's! I want to phone my father. He'll have to crank up the old Ford and run over to get us out of this scrape."

As the two boys left the clearing, they passed the deputy, sitting on a stump, chewing industriously, and killing mosquitoes. He regarded them with a

look, half humorous, half sympathetic.

"Sorry I had to throw a wrench into your gears, boys," said he, "but I couldn't help it. By the way, I've left my visiting cards at home on the piano; but my name's Cal Buncy."

"We understand, Mr. Buncy," replied Budge.

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"This writ had to be served. If you hadn't come, it might have been somebody a good deal worse."

"Thanks," said the officer. "Where do I bunk

and eat? Out with the horses?"

Budge laughed.

"We'll fix you up a bed in one of the cabins."
You'll eat with us."

"That's mighty white of you, boys," returned Buncy, gratefully. "So long as I'm keeper, you

won't have a mite of unnecessary trouble."

Up at Kimball's Roger soon had his father on the long-distance telephone. A few hasty words explained their dilemma. After a short series of bullet-like queries and directions, Lane, senior, cut off.

"Father always laughs like that when he gets his mad up," said Budge. "He'll hit the high places on his way over to-morrow. Told me to get in touch with Russell Lawton right away. Legore 'll have all the fight he wants."

After Budge had telephoned the young lawyer, and made an appointment with him at Parcherville for the

next forenoon, the boys went back to camp.

"Still, isn't it?" said Jim, as they entered the clearing. "I'd never have believed it'd make me feel lonesome not to hear that old saw chewing through

the logs."

The remainder of the afternoon dragged. Budge was not inclined to say much until he had talked with his father; and the other boys were hardly more communicative. Shortly before supper, Mer-

rithew came over to learn the cause of the unaccustomed stillness. He shook his head on hearing about

the injunction.

"Grannitt and Legore—yes, yes! A bad pair, boys, a bad pair! When you came down here you thought all you'd bargained for was a mill and so much stumpage, but let me tell you that you've bought trouble with two of the smoothest, trickiest scamps that ever disgraced a township. Each one's the most dishonest man in the county except the other; and what deviltry one can't think up the other can. They'll do anything for money. They've tried every way to cheat me out of my lot; but so long as I'm alive they'll never get it. Keep your eyes peeled!"

Supper was a silent meal, though Buncy did his best to enliven it with his dry wit. Even Percy was in the dumps. That evening there was no singing or

music, and all went to bed early.

Shortly after eight the next morning an auto came chugging in through the wood road.

"Here's your father, Budge!" shouted Percy.

Lane, senior's, face wore a worried look as he glanced over the silent mill; but his voice belonged to a man who felt sure of his ground and intended to hold it at any cost.

"What time did you start?" asked his son.

"A little before three."

"Pretty early!"

"None too much so for this business."

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After a brief consultation the two Lanes started for Parcherville in the Ford to interview Lawton. It was past noon when they returned, bringing the attorney with them. He looked the ground over, exchanged a few words with Buncy, and then drove away with Lane, senior.

"That young fellow's got good stuff in him," commented the sheriff, as the car disappeared. "When he puts on a few more years he'll make some of the

older lawyers take his dust."

"Where are they going, Budge?" asked Jim.

"Over to the old Peavey house to see if they can't find a discharge of that mortgage among Cousin Maria's papers. Father feels sure she must have paid up the loan, but neglected to have the discharge recorded. If they can only dig up some evidence of a settlement, Legore won't have a leg to stand on. The crook!"

They waited supper until seven, but there was no

sign of the Ford.

"Might as well eat," decided Budge. "We'll put father's share into the oven to keep it warm for him. When he's on a trail he forgets everything else. He's like a hound after a fox."

It was half past eight before the Ford rolled into

the clearing. Mr. Lane's face was sober.

"Haven't struck a thing yet. We called at Grannitt's office and arranged for a hearing in Judge Dilloway's chambers to-morrow afternoon. Then I took Lawton home. We went through the Peavey

house from top to bottom, but we couldn't find hide nor hair of that discharge. I'm certain the money was paid back, but it's up to us to prove it. Cousin Maria's mind failed toward the last, and she may have burned some of her papers, or she may have sent the discharge in to the registry by somebody who lost it or forgot to leave it for entry. Pretty blind work tracing anything that happened so long ago! Still, we won't give up hope yet. There's too much at stake."

The next morning Mr. Lane and the four boys started early for another search of the Peavey house. Buncy had made his peace with Briggs and Doggett and the three were smoking amicably together.

"Hope you'll find what you're looking for," wished the deputy. "Just between ourselves and the sawmill I don't waste much time loving either Ches Legore or Milo Grannitt. But of course business's business, and I have to serve what's put into my hands."

Five pairs of keen eyes, snarpened by the dread of a ruined summer, scrutinized every cubic inch of the Peavey homestead from garret to cellar, but all in vain. Cousin Maria had been of a saving disposition; the local tradition ran that in all her life she had never thrown anything away, and the experience of the searchers seemed to bear this statement out. Six generations of Peaveys had contributed to the miscellaneous assortment that passed, article by article, under the hands and eyes of the earnest millmen.

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Noon came. The house had been raked with a fine-tooth comb. But still no discharge! There was a frown on Mr. Lane's brow, but his fighting spirit was in no wise weakened.

"We won't put up our hands yet," said he. "I'll never knuckle under to Legore until I'm in the last ditch."

On their way back to the mill they stopped at Joshua Kimball's to telephone the news of their unsuccessful search to Lawton.

"Sorry you couldn't find that discharge," remarked the attorney; "but we'll have to make the best fight we can without it. I'm working on something here; but I owe it to you to say that the chances are at least a hundred to one against its amounting to anything. Still, I believe in pulling every string."

After dinner the boys and Mr. Lane rode to Parcherville, to attend the hearing before Judge Dilloway. At three o'clock they met in his chambers at the courthouse. Russell Lawton was there to act for them, while Milo Grannitt, smooth and coldblooded, represented Legore, who did not appear. The judge, though something of a stickler for legal forms, had the reputation of being perfectly fair, and the boys felt sure that their case would be decided on its merits.

The hearing began promptly. Lawton asked that the injunction be withdrawn.

"This mortgage is almost twenty years old, and has undoubtedly been satisfied. The Drinkwater

heirs have never claimed any interest on it; indeed, they were not aware of its existence until somebody called it to their attention. Technically, it of course constitutes a cloud on the title; but it is a cloud that may be removed at any time by the discovery of the discharge. These young men have entered upon their lumbering operations in good faith, supposing that they were absolutely within their rights. To restrain them from operating until the case can be tried in court will mean the ruin of their summer's work. They are perfectly willing to give a bond for any reasonable sum. In their behalf I ask that the injunction be vacated."

Judge Dilloway looked toward Grannitt. The Barham attorney rose, his face expressionless as a mask.

"Your Honor, my young brother has presented his clients' case with his usual ability, but his sympathies have evidently blinded him to certain important facts. The record shows that Reuben Drinkwater loaned Maria Peavey five hundred dollars; and there is nothing to prove that she ever paid it back. Hence in the eye of the law that mortgage still holds good. My client, Mr. H. Chesley Legore, has given value for it to the Drinkwater heirs; therefore whatever interest they may have had in the property has passed to him. He desires to stand strictly upon his legal rights; and he wishes those rights to be determined at the next term of court. Meanwhile, he cannot be blamed for desiring that no further waste be com-

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mitted upon the property. We do not care to accept any bond. However much we may sympathize with the energy and enterprise that has led these young men to embark in an untried field, we must see to it that they do not infringe upon the rights of lifelong residents of our own county. Before imperilling their resources, they should have satisfied themselves that the Peavey heirs had an unimpeachable title to that timber lot. Having failed to exercise due prudence, they must suffer the consequences. I ask that the injunction be allowed to stand."

The judge, after stating the law applicable to the

case, rendered his decision.

"While I feel very sorry indeed for the young men, I do not see my way clear to vacating the

injunction."

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Lawton's face fell; Mr. Lane and the boys were bitterly disappointed. There came a tap at the door: it was the young attorney's stenographer. He stepped out eagerly and they exchanged a few hurried sentences. On his return his countenance showed new hope.

"Your Honor," he requested, "I ask the privilege

of an adjournment for fifteen minutes."

Grannitt, suspicious, objected strongly.

"You have rendered your decision, Judge. The matter is settled."

Dilloway showed that he did not like the attorney's attitude.

"Your request is granted, Mr. Lawton," he said.

"You'd better wait here," suggested the young lawyer to his clients.

They sat in suspense, hardly daring to hope. The judge had rendered his decision; what could change it? Grannitt drummed with his fingers on his chair arm; his cynical face wore a contemptuous smile.

Before the stated time was up Lawton came back with two of the large black record-books. These he laid before Judge Dilloway, opening first one, and then the other.

"Here is the mortgage in Book Two Hundred and Eighty-seven—and here on page one hundred and fifteen in Book Two Hundred and Eighty-nine is the discharge!"

An exploding bomb could hardly have created a greater excitement in the courtroom. The boys started up, almost unable to believe their ears; Percy with difficulty restrained a shout of exultation. Grannitt, shocked out of his sneering complacency, but still incredulous, sprang to his feet and hurried forward. For two or three minutes he and the judge bent intently over the records.

"Everything seems to be in order," said Dilloway at last. "The only thing to do is to vacate the injunction and withdraw the keeper."

He glanced inquiringly toward Grannitt. The crestfallen attorney, a black scowl on his face, acknowledged his defeat.

"I see no other course, Your Honor. But I am sure that this discharge is not on the index."

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"That is true," confirmed Lawton. "Occasionally, however, the records reveal a mistake or an omission. I felt morally certain that the mortgage had been satisfied. It occurred to me that the discharge might be on the books, but that the person who did the indexing might have skipped that particular page. Such things have happened. I instructed my stenographer to go carefully over the records subsequent to the maturity of the mortgage. This afternoon she discovered the discharge."

It was a jubilant crowd of millmen that followed

Lawton to his office.

"Lucky for us you didn't give up beat when you couldn't find anything on the index," observed Mr. Lane.

"I said that the chances were over a hundred to one against us," remarked the attorney. "I'd better have said five hundred or a thousand to one. But we took the one, and the mill runs."

"Just to show how good I feel," said Percy, "I'm going to tie down the safety valve to-morrow morning

and try if I can burst the old boiler."

He reconsidered, however, and before leaving Parcherville purchased the most brilliant red sweater he could find.

"Got to celebrate somehow."

He bought also a piece of heavy pasteboard, three feet square.

"Never mind now what I want this for. I've a

use for it."

As they started back for Barham they passed Grannitt standing on a corner. Apparently the attorney did not see them; his look was cold and hard.

"You're not done with him yet," observed Mr. Lane. "No man with an eye like that lets go easily. He and Legore 'll make you all the trouble thay can. It 'll be brains against brains—Grannitt's against Lawton's. I'm backing Lawton."

The Ford ate up the road to Barham. On learning that work was to start again the next morning, Briggs and Doggett were in high spirits, and even Buncy

joined in the general rejoicing.

"Knocks me out of a job; but I'm mighty glad for you all. Besides, the mosquitoes out here are too 'tarnal thick."

Holway & Benner's team brought in two large wooden boxes that had come by freight to Edginton for Throppy.

"They're what I wrote home for," he answered in response to their queries. "Don't ask me any more

about them now, boys."

So, though they were curious, they pressed him no further.

In Grannitt's smoky den that night Hard Cash and his attorney held a conference. The lumberman came at the lawyer with a club.

"Ain't losin' your mind, be ye, Milo? If I was you I'd be ashamed to let such a young sprout as

Lawton put it over me like that."

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"Some people don't have any mind to lose," countered the defeated justice. "Now let's stop saying pleasant things to each other and get down to business. Lawton jumped my king that time; but you can put it down in your memorandum book that this particular game of checkers is a long way yet from being finished."

Five whiplike reports, closely following one another, shattered the Sabbathlike stillness of the early June morning. Before the echoes of the fusilade had died away Budge was standing in the middle of the cabin, wide awake. His father had started up from Throppy's bunk, which he had occupied, while its owner spent the night with Merrithew. Jim, more deliberate, had half risen on his elbow.

Whang-whang-whang-whang!

Budge sprang to the door and wrenched it open. At the same moment Briggs, Doggett, and Buncy

appeared at the entrance of their camp.

In the center of the clearing stood Percy, smoking twenty-two at his shoulder. Fastened up against a pine was the pasteboard he had purchased the day before, and on it, large as life, was a moose-head, done in charcoal. Glancing about, he became conscious of his audience. He threw out his chest.

"Drilled him through the jugular three times out of five at a hundred feet!" he exulted. "Some shooting —what?"

"Who drew that picture?" asked Budge.

Percy made a sweeping bow.

"I did," he acknowledged, proudly. "Work of art, isn't it? I've got Rosa Bonheur and Frederic Remington beaten to a frazzle. Makes me almost sorry to shoot it to pieces, it's so good. But I'll have to get practiced up before I go after the real thing."

Buncy pricked up his ears.

"What real thing's that you're goin' after?" he drawled.

"Why, the moose that chased me the other day! Didn't the boys tell you about him? He and I don't play in the same back yard any more. When we meet again, it's good-by moose!"

The deputy's eyes opened wide.

"Say, boy, even if you don't care anything about the statutes of your mother-in-law state, have mercy on your bank account an' don't try to shoot a moose, particularly in close time. Take something less expensive—Josh Kimball's cow or horse, for instance."

"Josh Kimball's cow or horse hasn't razzooed me, as that fellow's done. He's shattered my nervous system and made me lose the biggest trout I ever caught, besides destroying my reputation for truth and veracity among my friends. Who steals my purse steals trash (and that's no dream), but he that robs me of my good name, etc., etc. That's something I don't take from any moose, living or dead. There's a blood feud, a vendetta, between us. His head would look good over my fireplace at Warburton

this fall. I'm going to have his hide made into moc-

casins to present to my friends."

"He may have something to say about that. Well, hunt him, if you want to. I know it's done; but I shouldn't care to be the man caught doin' it. Your pocketbook must shout, where mine whispers. But say, boy! If you go after him at all, an' want to feed that boiler any more, get some twenty-two longs for that popgun. Those short ones 'll only ginger him up; they'll just tickle the skin of his neck, without goin' through it. But that's grantin' you hit him at all, which is some question. Believe me, there's all the difference in creation between shootin' at a pasteboard nailed to a tree an' tryin' to draw a bead on Old Ugly, with your hand shakin' as if somebody was twitchin' a string tied to your elbow, an' him comin' at ye like a steam engine an' hatin' himself so you can hear him a mile off. I know. I've been there up in the real woods years ago; an' between us 'twasn't in open time, either. Yes, siree! If you're fussy about your style of casket, better choose it before you go after him. Them horns an' hoofs were made for use, not ornament. He's long on memory an' temper, an' short on brotherly love. He never forgets an' he never forgives. He'll chase ye from now till Gabriel blows his trumpet, an' from here to the Golden Stairs. My advice to ye is, Stay out while the stayin's good. Another thing-if a miracle happens an' you get him, I'll have to get you. game warden as well as deputy sheriff!"

The John P. in Percy came uppermost.

"I hear you and I'm much obliged," he returned, stubbornly. "But no contraption of marrowbones wrapped in a bristly hide, with a nose like a hippopotamus and the grace and beauty of a stump fence, can do to me what he did and get away with it. Thanks for the hint on the twenty-two longs!"

"Well," said Buncy, "if you get into trouble, don't

say I didn't warn ye."

And there the matter rested.

Percy put his riddled target carefully away and began firing up.

"You see that my hunch about this boiler's not

getting cold was right," said he to the deputy.

"Yes, and I'm glad of it," responded the latter, heartily. "I like you boys and I want to see you do well."

Breakfast was soon over, and the mill crew gladly went to their posts. Percy woke the echoes with a long, shrill, triumphant whistle.

"Hope Grannitt and Legore can hear that," he

wished. "I'm giving 'em a little extra steam."

The machinery began to rumble and Briggs started in again on the log he had stopped sawing at Buncy's command three days before. Mr. Lane waited a half hour to make sure that everything was working well, then cranked his Ford and set out for New Hampshire. The deputy, who lived in Parcherville, was to go with him as far as Holway & Benner's where he could take the stage for home.

"Drop in on us any time," invited Budge. "We'll

try to see that you don't starve."

"Maybe I'll call," returned the officer, "but not on business, I hope. Watch out for squalls from Barham Four Corners."

He cast a serious glance toward Percy.

"One last word to you, boy! Forgit that moose!" The fireman was honest.

"I can't," he answered. "What's more, I don't want to. But I'm much obliged to you."

Buncy shook his head, as the car shot out of the

clearing.

Matters quickly fell into their customary routine. All the crew were back, including even the grouchy McAuliffe, if possible more disagreeable than ever, a marked contrast to the cheerful, obliging Graff.

"McAuliffe's a regular nightmare, isn't he?" remarked Budge. "He can get through here any time he wants to. If I could be sure of filling his place, I'd let him go now. I've stood about all I intend to from him."

At the close of the afternoon the boys went for a swim in the abandoned quarry Budge had discovered. By plumbing it with a stone tied on a fishline they found that the water was over fifty feet deep. The sheer wall gave them a fine opportunity to practice high diving.

After supper Jim made plans for the new skiff that was to take the place of Kimball's old punt.

"Shipbuilding on a fresh-water pond fifty miles

from the coast!" he jeered. "Wouldn't it amuse Uncle Tom!"

Meanwhile they patched up the derelict and went out for an occasional string of perch and pickerel. One night they rowed across to the trout brook, down which the moose had chased Percy. Repeated rumors of the animal's presence in the Barham woods influenced young Whittington to take his rifle, which was now supplied with the twenty-two longs.

"I'll be ready for him this time," he vowed, grimly. But no moose appeared. They did, however, catch a string of sizable trout, which Percy viewed with contempt mingled with melancholy.

"No two of these together 'll weigh so much as the beauty I lost," he mourned.

It was dark when they rowed back. A shimmering mist, touched with silver by the full moon, overhung the breezeless lake. From the black shallows along the tree-fringed shores the frogs were singing. Budge started a college air, and the others joined in, their voices echoing tunefully across the still water.

Dreamless nights succeeded busy days. Higher and higher rose the sawdust heap at the mill end, and each week saw a substantial addition to the number of board-piles on the sticking-ground. The work went on swimmingly; despite past interruptions the boys were well up to their schedule.

Merrithew was now able to limp about with the aid of a cane. He took a hand in the cooking, and frequently surprised Throppy with some appetizing

dish. The boy was fast becoming able to play checkers almost as well as his instructor.

"'Twon't do for me to get on my feet too soon," said the hermit. "For then I'll have to lose you. I've lived here for years without ever being really lonesome; but I'm afraid I'll hardly know what to do with myself when you and your friends are gone."

"That won't be for a long time yet," returned

Throppy.

The lad's health was noticeably better. He had more color, his step was lighter and quicker, and occasionally, as of old, he broke into a whistle or a snatch of song. Whether or not because of the tonic, which he still took dutifully to please Merrithew, his appetite had increased till it bade fair to match those of the other boys. Also, he was beginning to fret at doing nothing.

"Let me get into the harness, Budge," he petitioned. "I feel like a beggar, loafing about here and

living on the rest of you."

"Don't you be in too much of a hurry," replied Budge. "We're getting on all right. You'll soon have enough to do."

That night a comb of honey appeared on the boys'

supper table.

"Where did this come from?" asked Jim, in sur-

prise.

"Mr. Merrithew's bees," answered Throppy. "Didn't you know he has a half dozen hives in that

open hollow back of his camp? He and I took out a few combs to-day."

He displayed his red and swollen wrists.

"Had a veil over my face, but my gloves were too short."

On July 1st Budge, returning from his weekly trip to the county-seat, brought back a paper, which he unfolded and nailed upon a pine. It was a poster, printed in red and black, advertising a celebration for the Fourth on the Parcherville fair grounds. One of the items caught Percy's eye.

"Side-splitting contest at 9 A.M.," he read. "Prize of ten dollars for climbing to the top of a greased pole, thirty feet tall. That sounds like easy money.

Guess I'll go in and cop it."

"Yes, you will," scoffed Budge. "Wait till you see the stick—smooth as glass, slippery as an oiled bearing! I know; I've tried to climb one just like it. The contestants'll get the exercise; the crowd'll have the fun; and the town 'll save its money."

Percy rubbed his thumb and forefinger together.

"That's my ten! I can feel it."

Budge laughed.

"After you've burnt your fingers sliding down that spruce a few times, your sense of feeling won't be

so keen. At any rate, we'll all go."

"Better count me out," said Throppy. "Mr. Merrithew and I have planned something that 'll keep us busy. We'll enjoy ourselves here as much as you will at the fair grounds."

The others tried to persuade him to accompany

them, but he persevered in his decision.

The Fourth dawned without a cloud. At eight Budge started for Parcherville on his motor cycle. Percy and Jim walked out to the county road, and were picked up by Ezra Barker's Ford, in which they had engaged two seats. Percy, attired in his best, including the new red sweater, carried a bundle containing his oldest clothes, in anticipation of entering the greased-pole contest.

Halfway to their destination the car balked, and it took more than an hour to persuade it to start again. Percy, a good mechanic and an expert on gas engines, stripped off his sweater, donned his old suit, and crawled under the auto. Jim, unable to render any assistance, and having some errands to do in town, was glad to accept an invitation to go in another car. Percy reached the fairgrounds almost an hour late.

"No greased pole for me," he thought, ruefully. "Somebody else has got my ten."

Inside the high board fence surrounding the grounds rose a confused shouting. Percy hurried eagerly toward the open gate. The noise grew louder.

On a sudden the hubbub sank to a dead silence. Then the boy's ears caught startled cries and a rushing of feet. By the time he reached the entrance and could look across the space within the race track, he saw only the backs of a tumultuous crowd disappearing hurriedly through the opposite gate.

What could be the matter?

Percy stepped inside, his eyes on the retreating throng. To the left, not far from the gate, the inclosure was bounded by a hillside pasture separated from the fairgrounds by a three-wire fence. In this fence he noted a break, from which led fresh hoofprints. These, however, impressed him but little. He was wondering what attraction beyond the grounds had caused the crowd to make so hurried an exit.

Advancing briskly, he had traversed almost twothirds of the distance to the opposite fence. Suddenly, from behind a lemonade booth burst a dun-colored animal, the wreck of a red parasol impaled on his short sharp horns. Straight toward Percy he dashed, spurning the dust with speedy hoofs, and bellowing like distant thunder.

By the time the startled lad had turned to run, the bull was barely ten yards off!

Where should Percy find refuge? The flimsy booths afforded no hope. Before he could gain either of the entrances his pursuer would overtake him. Consternation cut his breath short; he could not run many yards further.

He looked about despairingly; a little to one side stood a pole. What it was and why it was there, Percy neither knew nor cared. Hope had extended a single straw; he grasped at it thankfully.

Close on his heels pressed the enemy. He leaped aside and made for the stick, dropping his bundle. As the bull stopped a moment to gore it, the young

millman flung his arms about the pole and attempted to clamber up. But the instant his entire weight bore upon the wood, down he slid; it was the greased spruce!

It would have been no fool's task to swarm up the slim, knotless stick, even had its peeled surface not been smeared with the slippery lubricant. Could he not reach the gate while the bull was goring the bundle? He was pulling himself together for a sprint when the animal raised his head. If the chance had ever existed, it was gone now. The pole was his only hope.

Percy could almost feel his foe's horns penetrating his back as he gave one mighty, desperate leap. Fortunately he struck a place on the stick where the grease had been scraped off by the climbers. His grip held and he began to wriggle upward; safety would not be assured until he could pass his hands through the short loop of rope fastened to the top.

Rage made the bull blind. He dashed by below, one of his horns just grazing the pole, then swung about, baffled. What had become of the red sweater he had been chasing? Presently his bloodshot eyes discerned Percy, almost twenty feet in the air, climbing frantically.

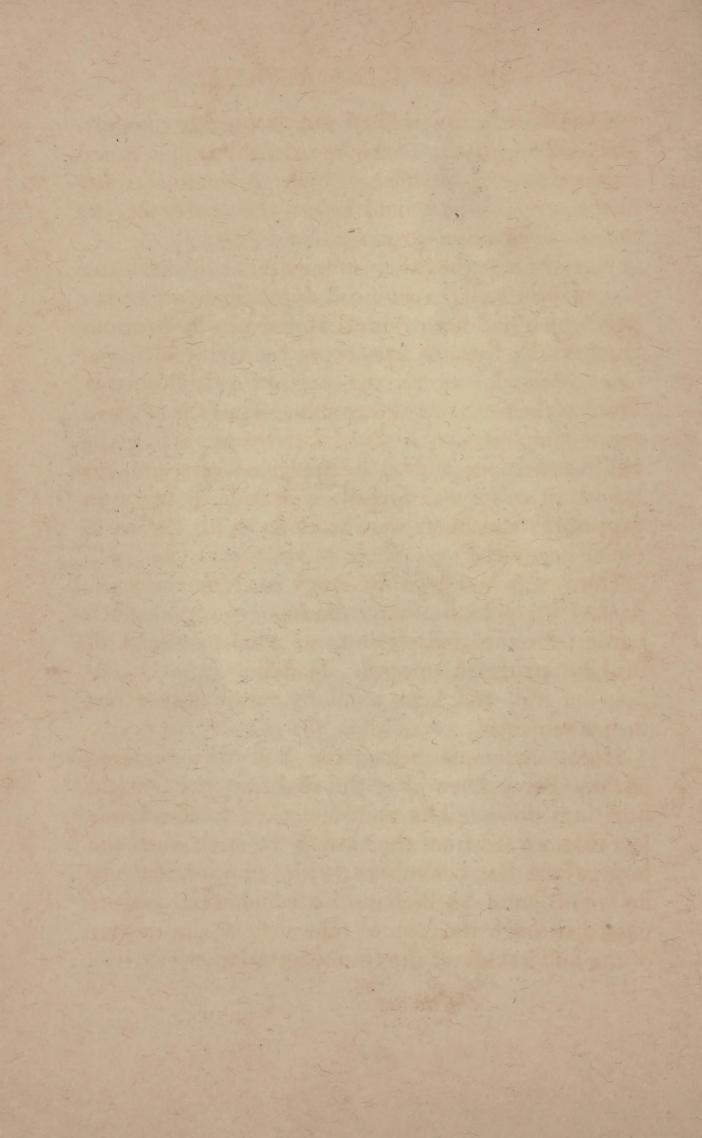
With an enraged bellow the brute plunged once more at the spruce that was cheating him of his prey. This time his head struck the mark with a fearful

bump.

The pole rocked. Percy's face was dashed against



THIS TIME HIS HEAD STRUCK THE MARK WITH A FEARFUL BUMP



the wood; his cap jarred off and dropped in the dust. His hold loosened. Down he slipped, his fingers and palms scorched by their convulsive clutch. A few feet more and he would be at the mercy of the infuriated beast.

But just here the closely knit material of his sweater served him well. As he slid down that part of the pole which had been rubbed almost dry by previous climbers, by hugging the spruce tightly he managed first to delay his course, and then to stop it altogether about eight feet from the ground. His cap, too, had created a diversion in his favor by attracting the bull's attention; and as he struggled to regain his former place he was ruefully conscious of the ruin that horns and hoofs were working in his new two-dollar headpiece.

Hard as it had been for Percy to climb the lower part of the pole, he found the higher portion much harder; for the grease there was almost untouched. Still he struggled upward. Handhold after handhold he won and kept painfully, until only a few inches remained.

Hoofs drummed below; the bull was charging again. Percy knew that the slightest shock would hurl him down. The parasol-decked forehead was less than a yard from the base of the stick when the boy gave a last convulsive writhe upward, flinging his right hand as high as he could. His fingers passed through the loop of rope just as the impact of the bull's skull set the spruce tottering.

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For an instant young Whittington dangled by one hand. Then his other also caught the becket and he hung limply, uncomfortable, but temporarily safe.

And now a new danger threatened. Loosened by the day's climbing and the brute's charge, the pole no longer stood upright. Already Percy's body swung from it at something of an angle; hardly had he noted this when another assault by the animal bent it still farther. One more shock would bring it down.

But succor was at hand. Through the gate hurried a crowd with ropes and pitchforks. The bull, engrossed in his attack, paid no attention to the newcomers. Again he butted the spruce; its base moved in the ground and little by little its top sank. Then down it came with a rush.

Percy struck on his feet several yards from the beast, and began to run. His pursuer, thudding along, head down, shot suddenly in between two lines of men, and a rope, skillfully cast, brought him to a standstill.

Seeing his foe in the toils, Percy gladly came to a halt. Breathless and perspiring, he was in a sorry plight. His straw-colored hair was plastered damply down on his flushed brow. His hands smarted. His legs were wabbly. Dark grease stains disfigured his trim trousers and gay red sweater. He offered a striking contrast to the cool, well-dressed lad who had entered the grounds less than ten minutes before.

While the bull, red-eyed and breathing hard, was

led off, snorting his indignation, Percy picked up his cap and bundle. The carefully wrapped working suit had been ripped to tatters by the animal's horns and hoofs; and the jaunty cap, ground into dusty shapelessness, was hardly worth reclaiming.

A practical joker himself, Percy was extremely particular about his personal appearance and keenly sensitive to ridicule. As he faced the grinning crowd of men and boys, he would have liked to sink into the earth. Their jests and snickers hurt his pride. He felt like skulking away and hiding; but where?

To his great relief he saw Budge and Jim coming across the grounds to learn the cause of the excitement. Percy hurried to meet them. They stared at him in surprise.

"What's happened to you?" demanded Budge.

"Nothing much. I've met the enemy and I've come mighty close to being his. I'll tell you about it later. Get me away from here."

As they started for the gate a stout man with a gold-lettered blue ribbon in his lapel detached himself from the crowd and followed them.

"Hold on a minute!" he hailed. "Here's something for you."

He passed a sealed envelope to Percy.

"What's this?" asked young Whittington, wonderingly. "A Black-Hand letter?"

Tearing it open, he pulled out a folded ten-dollar

bill.

"I'm chairman of the celebration committee,"

explained the stranger. "You're the only fellow who's climbed the greased pole; and this is the prize. Guess you've earned it."

His eye dwelt reflectively on Percy.

"You've said something," agreed the victim. "Guess I have."

He put the bill into his pocket and left the grounds with his friends. In a few minutes they reached the garage where Budge had put his motor cycle. There a liberal application of soap, hot water, and gasoline made Percy as presentable as circumstances would allow. As the grease disappeared from his clothing his spirits came back.

"Never could have won it in the world if it hadn't been for that bull," he conceded. "He was ten times worse than the moose. Animals seem to be fond of me. Wonder what 'll take after me next. I'm going to have this sweater dyed green. Lucky I'm a tensecond sprinter!"

There were a balloon ascension and a baseball game in the afternoon, and fireworks in the evening, so it was well into the night before the boys got back to camp. They entered the clearing at about the same time, Budge on his motor cycle, and Jim and Percy afoot, after being dropped by their auto at the entrance of the wood road. An inexplicable droning greeted their ears.

"What's that?" exclaimed Jim.

Beside the boiler a dark figure rose suddenly. There was the click of a switch. Lights flashed up in

the cabins and through the mill. A voice pierced the silence.

"No more broken lamp chimneys!"

"Throppy's work!" shouted Budge. "He's celebrated the Fourth by lighting the plant with elec-

tricity. How did you ever do it?"

"Easy enough!" said the electrician, modestly. "I sent home for a second-hand dynamo with wires, bulbs and switch. The stuff came in those boxes that arrived the other day. While you were gone, Mr. Merrithew and I set up the dynamo here beside the pumping engine and installed the wires and bulbs. To light up it's only necessary to take the belt off the pump and put it on the dynamo. Fifteen pounds of steam 'll give plenty of power; and if the fire's banked in good shape the boiler 'll hold that and to spare. I know, for I've watched it. So you needn't buy any more kerosene."

"Throppy," remarked Budge, after he had finished an inspection of the lighting plant, "your brains are going to be one of the company's biggest assets this summer. Don't you dare to say another word about

not being worth your salt!"

#### XI

#### MORE TROUBLE

LEGORE and Grannitt were in the latter's office the morning after Percy's climb at Parcherville. The lumberman had come to have a mortgage foreclosed. Both were in better humor than they had been for some time. Legore had gotten over his pique at the failure of the injunction. The lawyer was in a jocular mood.

"Well, Ches," said he around his cigar, "when are

we going at 'em again?"

"We don't have to go at 'em again," returned his client. "We're at 'em all the time. I hear from the Peavey lot every day. There isn't a pine needle drops about that mill that I don't know of. Their goose is cookin', an' pretty soon it 'll be done brown."

The lawyer's eyes glittered maliciously.

"Green, careless boys," he mused. "Birds of passage, irresponsible strangers, here for a vacation, for mere amusement, taking the bread out of the mouths of our own honest, hard-working fellow-townsmen. July and August are bad months for a town to have a portable mill operating; and unburned slash is dangerous, very dangerous. This is

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an unusually dry season. Our three selectmen are all careful, solid, conservative citizens who have the good of the town at heart. Benjamin Skinner (I think you hold a mortgage on his farm, Chesley; I drew it), Zachariah Brewster, and Leslie Shaw, all under some obligation to you or me. They would be justified, don't you think, Chesley, in forbidding operations altogether; or, in the case of Brewster, who owns the adjoining lot to the south, in demanding so heavy a bond that it would be, I might almost say-ahem-prohibitive. Perhaps for ten thousand dollars! Signed by two good, reliable sureties, resident in the county. I do not want to appear in this openly. My modesty will, I fear, be my undoing. A shy, shrinking violet, Chesley; a modest flower, born to blush unseen. My motto is not to let my left hand know what (or whom) my right hand doeth; and vice versa. So long as I pull the strings (and get well paid for pulling them), I don't care who gets the credit or discredit for it. I might do something with the bank at Parcherville in due time; you know I'm one of the directors and their attorney. I'm bound to say that these things are mostly bluffs. Still, though they may not amount to much, they'll worry our young friends, make 'em lose time, wear 'em out."

"Never mind how little they amount to," rejoined the lumberman. "Make those fellers all the trouble you can. I'm goin' to smash 'em, anyway; an' the more hornets' nests you can stir up for 'em before

I git ready, the better it 'll suit me."

"I understand," pursued Grannitt, "that the father of one of 'em is John P. Whittington, the millionaire railroad man."

"Huh!" snorted Legore. "That don't scare me none. I don't owe him nothin' and I haven't any railroad stock he can freeze me out of. I'll teach his boy to keep off other people's grass."

For a week everything at the mill ran on smoothly. Throppy's electric lights proved to be a great convenience in the camps. There were no more lamps to fill, and no more smoky chimneys to clean and break.

Thanks to the size and quality of the logs, the mill was averaging over ten thousand feet a day. The pile of sawdust was growing into a very respectable hill, which bade fair soon to overtop the rough board roof. Every day Budge, Throppy, and the marker put their heads together over the records shown by the tally boards. They found the result highly satisfactory.

"I've worked in a good many mills and on a good many lots," said Doggett, "but I never saw better stock than we're turning out; and I never knew things to run smoother than they're going now. There! I oughtn't to have said that! Boasting's

liable to bring us bad luck."

"I've heard that Stephen Girard said that he had good luck in his business because he always planned for it. That's the only kind of luck I believe in."

"Maybe you're right," conceded Doggett. "Still,

#### MORE TROUBLE

it's just as well not to shout too loud till you're out of the woods."

The hundred thousand feet of boards were now on the sticks. According to his plan, Budge disposed of these at a reduced figure, for the sake of securing a supply of ready money.

"What do you think now of vest-pocket sawmills, Jim?" he asked. "If this keeps on it won't be long

before we'll be on Easy Street."

"I'm bound to say that so far you've done better than you promised," granted Jim. "I only hope it'll keep up."

Spurling's spare time, mornings, noons, and nights, was devoted to finishing the boat that he had begun. The other boys were glad to lend a hand when asked

to do so and the craft progressed rapidly.

Percy still kept up his shooting at the pasteboard moose head, patching his riddled target as best he could. A strange attachment had sprung up between him and Maliber's hound; Jack would have little to do with the other boys, but he showed an unmistakable fondness for young Whittington. The melancholy-looking dog and the light-hearted, jesting boy made an odd pair.

Two weeks more went by, marked by only one disturbing feature. This was the unusual number of little fires which were constantly springing up in the most unexpected places. Hardly a day passed but the entire mill crew were compelled to knock off to

nip in the bud some threatened conflagration.

"I can't understand it," said Budge. "The wire mesh of that bonnet on the stack is too close to let any very large cinders get through it. Besides, some of the fires that have given us the worst scares have started to windward of the mill. It almost seems as if somebody was setting them."

"I've thought the same thing," said Jim.

The eyes of both involuntarily turned toward McAuliffe, and they said no more.

There was a brisk breeze from the west. Graff, who had been helping the pitman, raised his head and sniffed.

"I smell smoke."

He ran round the end of a pile of slash which lay to windward of the mill. A moment later he raised a shout.

"Water!"

Filling a pail from the barrel, Budge darted round the pile. A lively fire had started in the duff and was spreading rapidly. Budge and Graff were obliged to fight their hardest to extinguish it.

"Now how in the world could that have caught?" asked Graff, after the last spark had been stamped out.

"Don't know," answered Budge, shortly.

But he had seen McAuliffe come round that very pile only a few minutes before. A little more and with so strong a wind, the mill would have gone. The boys felt serious as they started work again. That blaze certainly could not have come from a flying cinder. Had they a firebug among them?

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It was Friday when this last fire occurred. Saturday morning, when they were on the point of starting work, Briggs made the unpleasant discovery that the main belt, running from the engine to the saw arbor, had been cut diagonally for several feet.

"Can't you lace it up, Ote?" asked Budge.

"No use," replied the sawyer. "If it had been a square cut, I could have done it; but this diagonal slash can't be repaired in that way. The only thing to do is to put in an entirely new piece. I think I can find one in the chest."

Fortunately he was right; and after an hour and a half the new section was put in and laced up. But the incident cast a gloom over the boys' spirits for the rest of the day. A thing of this sort could not happen accidentally; somebody had done the mischief in cold blood. But who?

Budge's face was flushed and his eyes sparkled with anger, as he called the other boys together into their cabin while Briggs and Doggett were making

the necessary changes.

"Fellows," he exploded, indignantly, "this thing has gone far enough; I'm not going to stand it any longer. We've a traitor in camp, and I don't think it 'll take much of a detective to find out who he is. Might as well take the bull by the horns and have it done with. What do you say, Jim?"

Jim's face was stern; he realized the gravity of the

situation.

"I feel the same as you do," he rejoined. "This

can't go on. The sooner the thing comes to a head, the better."

He and Budge exchanged looks.

"Better put it up to McAuliffe now, hadn't we?" asked Lane.

"Yes."

"I don't believe in spying or carrying tales," remarked Throppy, quietly, "but I might as well tell you that he has a jug of hard cider hidden out in the pines. I saw him taking a drink yesterday. Better handle him with gloves!"

Down one of the scoot roads echoed a creaking and

shouting.

"Here he comes now with a load of logs!" said Percy.

A minute later the teamster drove by the cabin.

Budge opened the door.

"Come in here a minute, will you, McAuliffe?"

McAuliffe stopped his team and entered. His face was flushed and there was a trace of defiance in his bearing.

"What do you want of me?" he growled, suspi-

ciously.

The faint odor of hard cider told that Throppy had been right.

Budge wasted no words.

"We think you know something about those fires and that belt."

The teamster's stolid features purpled. His hands clinched and he took a step forward.

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"Do you mean to say that you think I'm at the bottom of the trouble we've been having here?" he blustered, furiously.

Budge was cool as a cucumber.

"I asked you if you knew anything about them," he returned, evenly.

"Well, I won't answer! I didn't come in here to be insulted!"

He whirled toward the door. Jim shut it and put his back against it.

"Get out of my way or it 'll be worse for you!" snarled McAuliffe, threateningly.

Jim did not move, but his glance grew more alert and his body stiffened. McAuliffe hesitated, taking stock of his antagonist. It looked like trouble. He made a step forward, then reconsidered.

"I'm through!" he said. "There isn't money enough in Barham to hire me to work in this gang a

minute longer. Let me out!"

"That suits us," returned Budge. "Here's your

pay!"

He handed the hauler a sealed envelope. Mc-Auliffe snatched it ungraciously and left the cabin with a menacing look at Jim. Without stopping to unload the scoot, he unhitched his horses and drove them out through the pines toward the main road.

"There's a good job done," said Budge as the jingling of the harnesses died away. "I wish he'd

gone a month ago."

"Where'll you get a new hauler?" asked Percy.

"I'll scare up one somewhere. Only wish I could find another man like Graff."

True to his word, he made a foray on his motor cycle that very afternoon, and by dint of persuasion and the promise of liberal pay secured Peleg Stickney, a young farmer, to take McAuliffe's place.

For several days the work at the mill ran on without interruption. Stickney proved to be a good exchange for McAuliffe. And there were no more fires.

"Guess I let the right man go," said Budge.

And the others agreed with him.

One of the best members of the new force was Henry Ireson, the yardman. He was over sixty years old, a born humorist, and at the same time a steady, tireless worker. His long experience around portable mills had given him a fund of information that was always at the service of the boys.

"If I had a dozen like him and Graff, I wouldn't

ask for a better crew," said Budge.

Throppy was practically well. His cough had vanished, his strength had come back, and he was doing more work every week.

"Never felt better in my life," he declared. "I'm not going to play at being an invalid any longer."

It was a joyful day for him when Merrithew allowed him to give up the medicine. Though Throppy had taken the hemlock conscientiously, he had never learned to like it. During the long summer evenings he and the hermit waged many a hard-fought battle over the checkerboard; but the

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boy always felt that his antagonist could have won at any time he desired. Pete Simmons, the loader, afterward told him that Merrithew had held the state championship.

The boat was finished at last. Putting her on rollers, the four boys dragged her down to the lake and launched her after supper one evening. She floated like a duck and was tight as a drum, a credit to her master builder and his assistants. On her trial trip the combined weight of the party could not settle her deep enough to make her leak a single drop.

A southeast land fog was drifting down over the mountain and across the lake as they returned to the

beach. Jim lifted his head and sniffed.

"That's coming from the direction of the ocean," he said. "I can almost smell the salt in it. I like it, but it makes me homesick. I can imagine I hear the gulls and see Tarpaulin looming. I'm uneasy as a fish out of water. There's a lobstering ground a few miles west of Matinicus where the sea comes from four ways at once. I want to get out again into a place like that, and feel the old boat rolling under me, and the screw jumping and kicking. I want to get hold of an oar and a steering wheel, to pull a lobster trap and to feel the chafe and sag of a trawl."

He was silent as they made their way back through

the gloom of the pines to the cabin.

Before supper the next night they went for a swim in the old quarry. Percy, diving from the brink, vanished in a flurry of foam. One minute passed,

two, three, and still he did not come up. The boys eyed the smooth, dark-green surface with growing anxiety.

"Couldn't have hit his head, could he?" asked

Budge.

"No," answered Jim, "the water's too deep."

"Then where is he?"

As if in answer to the question, the crown of their missing mate bobbed up beside a shelf at the water's edge.

"Where've you been, Perce?" rose the cry.

"Under this ledge."

Percy nodded at the shelf.

"There's a hollow beneath it, filled with air."

"What did you stay under so long for? To make

us think you were drowned?"

"No! What do you take me for? That would be a low-lived trick. I was just looking around, and forgot that you would be anxious."

"Well, don't do it again."

"I won't. Come under here, the rest of you, and take a look."

Percy disappeared again. The others followed him. Presently they found themselves in semidarkness under a rocky roof, only a few inches above the water.

"Great place to hide, if anybody was chasing you, wouldn't it be?" asked Percy.

"Yes," replied Budge, "if the other fellow didn't

know you were there."

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Next morning, just after the mill started, an incident occurred which almost resulted in a tragedy that would have made all the trouble before seem trifling. Briggs was cutting the first section off a large log. Doggett, grasping the board to take it away, accidentally canted it onto the saw. As the carriage slid back, the teeth of the saw, coming up, caught the board and wrenched it from the marker's hands.

Crash! With a terrific ripping and cracking the wood was rent asunder. One section was hurled directly through the roof. Another struck Briggs a glancing blow on the side of his head and shoulder, knocking him backward over the stringer. A little more and his head would have been taken off.

Cries of horror rang through the mill and all work stopped instantly. Jim sprang forward and lifted the limp, senseless body of the sawyer. The left side of his head was fearfully bruised and his arm hung loosely, as if it were broken. The rest of the crew quickly gathered about Jim and his burden.

"Better take him into our cabin," advised Doggett. Soon the injured man was lying in his own bunk. He muttered and stirred feebly, and then tried to sit

up, but at once fell back.

"What happened?" he groaned.

"The saw threw a board and hit you," replied Doggett. "It's a wonder you weren't killed. It was my fault," he added, remorsefully. "I let the end get away from me."

Briggs tried to smile.

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"Nonsense, 'Gene! You're not to blame. That's one of the chances a millman takes. But it was a stiff tunk. I feel as if a pile driver had hit me."

He attempted to lift his arm, but winced, and dropped it with a groan. A moment later he col-

lapsed in a faint.

"Better go for Doc Melvin as quick as you can,

Budge," said Jim.

Lane needed no urging. He hurried away on his motor cycle, and in a half hour was back with the physician. By this time the sawyer had recovered consciousness, and Melvin gave him a thorough examination.

"No bones broken," he reported at its close. "And that's a miracle. But you won't be able to handle that buzz-saw any more for some weeks to come. I know it may be hard for you to keep quiet, but you want to be glad it isn't any worse."

All realized the justice of Melvin's verdict; but they also realized that it was liable to prove a serious thing for the plant. Briggs was easily the best man in the entire crew, and his sudden loss was a heavy blow. At a council that night in their cabin, the boys discussed a readjustment of their working force.

"'Gene could take the saw, all right," said Budge, "but who'd do the marking? No! He'd better stay where he is. Jim, I guess it's up to you! You know Ote has been giving you points on sawing ever since we started. It almost seems as if he foresaw this accident."

## MORE TROUBLE

Jim hesitated.

"Do you think I can do it?" he asked.

"Sure you can! Come now! We're in a tight place; help us out!"

Jim accepted the responsibility.

"If you're willing to take a chance on me, I'll do

my best."

"Good! That's settled! Now for the rest of the force! We're one man short and we'll have to go out and hire somebody."

"No, you won't," said Throppy. "I'm coming in

on this deal."

"Think you can stand it?"

"Sure!"

"Then we'll break you in on firing. I'll take Jim's place as roller, and Perce can be pitman. How does that hit everybody?"

"O. K.!" rose the chorus.

Soon the mill was running at full blast under the new regime.

#### XII

## INJUNCTION NUMBER TWO

AFTER the reorganization of the mill force the work went on as smoothly as before, although not quite so rapidly. Of course Jim at first could not turn out as many thousand feet of boards a day as Briggs; but what he did he did thoroughly and well. His first week's production was somewhat smaller than those that had preceded it; every day, however, saw it approaching nearer to the veteran's record. Budge, as roller, made up in activity for what he lacked in strength; and he experienced no difficulty in keeping the stringers full of logs for Jim. Percy found that his duties as pitman took more muscle than firing; but under Doggett's able instruction he readily acquired the knack of handling boards and of distributing them among the different riggings. Throppy, glad at last to be employed actively about the mill, threw himself whole-heartedly into his task of feeding the boiler, and had little trouble in keeping the steam up to the required point. By the beginning of the second week production was back almost to normal.

Briggs was soon able to leave his bunk and to be

out around the mill, though of course he could do no work. Watching each of the boys in turn, the exsawyer found it possible to make many valuable suggestions.

"I've filled every position around a portable mill," said he. "Strange if I didn't know something about

'em!"

He took his enforced vacation cheerfully.

"Might have been a blamed sight worse," he remarked. "I ought to be thankful I'm alive at all. No use crying over spilled milk; the best thing to do is to go to work and fill the pitcher again."

A giant log, twelve feet long, and between three and four feet through at the butt, lay on the outer end of the stringers. Budge tackled it with his roll-

ing hook, but could hardly stir it.

"This big fellow's a little too much for me," he

confessed. "I'll have to call for help."

Jim took the butt, near the saw; Doggett got behind the middle; while Budge stationed himself at the top, which lay toward the sawdust pile. Prying, pushing, and heaving, they rolled the monster upon the carriage. Briggs was an interested spectator while the leviathan was being reduced to two-inch planks.

"As pretty a stick as I ever saw," he commented as Percy slid the last board into the pit. "Wish I could 've had a hand in cutting it up. That was a real log, and no mistake! Not much like some of the saplings I've had to saw, just two slabs and a streak

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of sawdust! Those big fellows are pretty scarce nowadays. Reminds me of a lot I knew about in the town next to the one where I was born. Years ago a man had a choice group of one hundred pines. They were little, young trees when he was a boy and he would never allow them to be cut while he was alive. They averaged about sixty feet tall and from three to four feet through at the butt, and were as straight as an arrow. That grove was the apple of his eye. He kept it well thinned out and was mighty careful that the fire didn't get into it. Before he died he estimated it at one hundred thousand feet, one thousand to a tree. Some time after his death his son had it cut, and it yielded about one hundred and thirty thousand feet."

Joe Maliber came running down one of the scoot roads. His face and neck were marked with red spots and his left eye was almost closed.

"What's the matter, Joe?" inquired Budge.

"De bee sting me, comin' out of a knot hole! We find a hollow-hearted pine, full of honey. Come on, everybody! Fetch de pail!"

Joe's words were like sparks to tinder. With wild whoops the mill crew knocked off. There was a rush to the cabins, a seizing of pails and pans, and a helter-skelter scamper up the scoot road in Joe's wake.

A hurried run of a few hundred feet brought them to the clearing where Maliber and Benoit were chopping.

"Dere!" exclaimed Joe. "See him!"

He pointed to a fallen pine, about which an angry cloud of insects was buzzing, filling the air with an angry, spiteful hum. From a knot hole about ten feet above the butt oozed a thin, yellow stream of honey.

Jack, sniffing the dripping sweetness, began licking it off the bark below the orifice. Three or four of the bees stabbed him with their stings, and, yelping, he beat a hasty retreat.

"We smoke 'em out," said Benoit.

Collecting a few handfuls of dry twigs and needles, he started a fire a short distance to windward of the knot hole, covering the blaze with green boughs as soon as it was burning briskly. Bewildered by the smudge, the bees flew aimlessly hither and thither. Joe and Louis worked their cross-cut saw vigorously, and soon laid open the insects' hoard; and boys and men, heedless of occasional stings, began filling their pails and pans with pieces of the golden comb, not forgetting to eat generously during the process. It was a sticky, happy crowd that straggled back to the mill to store away their plunder in the cabins.

"Must be over a hundred pounds in all, don't you

think?" said Budge.

"All that," replied Jim. "Enough to last us the rest of the summer, at any rate."

The next morning Briggs left for a short visit to his home in New Hamsphire.

"Good luck to you, boys," he said. "I'll be on

deck again in a couple of weeks, ready to take hold as hard as ever—that is, if you want me."

"I hardly know how we'll get along without you, Ote," said Budge. "We'll be more than glad to see

you back."

That Friday, Budge, going in as usual to the Parcherville Savings and Trust Company, received an unpleasant surprise. When he presented his check at the window, the treasurer made no movement to cash it.

"You're under age, aren't you?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Lane.

"Then I'm sorry, but we can't handle your account any longer. Our directors have voted not to transact any further business with minors."

Budge went over to see Lawton.

"What am I to do?" he asked. "I've got to have the ready cash every week, and this is the only bank in town. I suppose that I can have the money sent down from the city by express; but I don't like to go to so much trouble."

The attorney's eyes sparkled with anger.

"It's a small, sneaky trick!" he exclaimed. "And I'm sure Milo Grannitt's at the bottom of it; he's one of the directors of the bank. It's men like him that bring the law into disrepute. Well, he won't make anything out of his dirty work this time. I can fix it so that you can get your money without any trouble."

"How?" asked Budge.

"Have it put in my name as agent, if you care to trust me. The bank won't be able to find any fault with that arrangement. You can keep the deposit book and check book, and when you need any money, I'll go over with you and draw it. How will that do?"

"It suits me to a T," responded the young lumber-

man. "Another knock-out for Grannitt!"

So the matter was arranged on this basis.

"Wonder where that big log came from that I sawed the other day," said Jim at supper that night. "I'd like to see the stump."

"Jerry Ladd hauled it in," remarked Percy. "He told me it came from where Joe and Louis were chop-

ping."

"Let's go and take a look at the place," proposed Jim. "We can clear up the dishes, after we get back."

In the clearing at the end of the scoot road the four boys met Merrithew. The hermit was surveying somewhat disconsolately the devastation wrought by saw and ax.

"It's hard for me to get over my feeling for trees," he said. "I've lived among 'em so long that I've actually come to look on 'em as my friends. Still, this sight doesn't hurt me so much as it would have done two months ago."

He glanced at Throppy.

"The biggest log we've sawed so far went through the mill the other day," remarked Budge. "We're looking for the stump."

"I'll show it to you," said Merrithew.

He led them through a tangle of slash to the other side of the clearing.

"Here it is!"

The flat, yellowish top, marked with scores of concentric circles, was more than four feet across. Its heart was of a light straw color, and almost dry; but from the outer ring of sap-wood the pitch had exuded copiously in amber drops.

"Looks something like that honey you ate so much

of, Perce," observed Budge.

"Yes, it does look like it; but I didn't eat half so much as you did."

Merrithew was scanning the stump keenly.

"Boys, this tree has opened its heart to us. It has written a diary of its life, its autobiography, in these rings. Each represents the wood that has been added in a single season. If I had a good microscope I could follow a straight line drawn from bark to center, and tell you what had happened every year. Here would be a dry season; here, a fire; here, a cold year with frost every month; everything that had any effect on the growth of the tree is recorded in these little narrow rings. They stand for history, too. These four mark the Civil War; farther in is the Mexican War. This ring stands for the battle of Waterloo, and the three inside it for the War of 1812. Still closer to the center is the American Revolution and the Declaration of Independence. I've seen an arrow head of red stone, cut right in two by the saw,

taken from near the heart of an old-growth pumpkin pine. The redskin who shot it into the tree may have fired it at a deer or at some white man in one of the Indian wars almost two hundred years ago. Yes, there's a good deal more than mere wood bound up inside the bark of these pines. Their lives are recorded on their bodies, just as the lives of you boys are being recorded on yours. Every act, and even every thought, leaves its mark, for you or somebody else to see years afterward. Remember that!"

Merrithew's audience had given him close atten-

tion.

"I always thought that trees were just trees," said Percy. "But you make 'em almost human. Wish J. P. could have heard this talk!"

The hermit looked puzzled.

"J. P.?"

"Yes; my father, John P. Whittington."

Merrithew started with surprise, and a shadow crossed his face.

"Are you the son of John P. Whittington, the millionaire?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Percy.

The recluse gave him a strange look, but did not pursue the subject any further. Presently, declining Budge's invitation to call on them at their cabin, he returned to his own camp. The boys could not understand his sudden coldness.

"I don't see what we can have said to offend him," remarked Budge. "What's the trouble,

Throppy? You know him better than the rest of us do."

"I haven't the least idea why he should go off like that. It's always been a mystery to me how he came to live here alone. He's never said a word about his early life, and of course I wouldn't ask him."

A few minutes before noon the next day four men filed down the wood road into the mill clearing. Ahead was Cal Buncy, chewing vigorously. Close on his heels followed a stubby, red-faced individual with snapping black eyes and a generally pugnacious aspect, as if he were looking for trouble; a heavy gray military mustache covered his upper lip. Behind him came a tall, thin, hatchet-faced person with a frightened look, his head stooped as if in the act of perpetually dodging a blow. A man of medium height with a full beard, wearing an old straw hat and a faded, threadbare Prince Albert, brought up the rear.

Budge had seen the three frequently at Holway & Benner's during the past few weeks, and he recognized them at once as Benjamin Skinner, Zachariah Brewster, and Leslie Shaw.

The silent procession headed straight for the roller. Halting his company on the brow at the end of the stringers, Buncy drew a folded paper from his pocket.

"Got another injunction," said he, seriously, offering it to Budge.

Budge's heart came up into his throat; but he put on a bold front and took the paper.

"These three gentlemen," continued Buncy, indicating his companions, "are the Barham selectmen. They think this mill is a danger to the place in such a dry season, so they feel you'd better not operate here any more until fall."

This thunderbolt out of a clear sky struck Budge speechless. Buncy's face and voice showed the regret he felt. The three town officers were distinctly embarrassed; they coughed, reddened, shuffled their feet, and glanced at one another shamefacedly, not daring to meet Budge's eyes. Each seemed to be waiting for the other to act as spokesman. At last the short man with the bristly mustache braced himself with an evident effort and made the plunge.

"You know there hasn't been much rain for weeks," he said, gathering courage from the sound of his own voice. "And you've been havin' lots of fires around here. Of course you've been lucky enough so far to put 'em all out. But if one should get away from you, it might destroy thousands of dollars' worth of

timber. So I guess you'll have to stop."

He glanced at his slinking colleagues.

"That's right," they approved.

Budge found his voice.

"But we must operate now if we operate at all. We've got to leave here and go back to college in

September."

"Sorry, but you'll have to shut down for the next month or so. We can't risk burning up the town for the benefit of you boys."

"That's right," affirmed the other two again.
Budge was at a loss for a reply. Skinner looked at his associates.

"Guess that's all we've got to say."

The other two nodded sagely. Relief was on their faces as they turned and filed silently out of the clearing. Buncy remained behind. He did not free his mind until the last selectman was well on his way

toward the county road.

"Sorry to come, boys, but I couldn't help it. That's the drawback about this sheriff business—you have to do a good many things you don't like to. Between us, those three are a set of mean skunks who don't dare to call their souls their own. Ches Legore's got a strangle hold on 'em. They dance when he whistles. A mortgage's as bad as one of them Middle Age thumbscrews. Never forget that, boys! Don't sell your future if you can help it. Pay as you go and nobody 'll have the whip hand of you."

"Then we're stopped again?" said Budge.

"Yes, but I hope not for long. You'd better telephone Lawton right away."

Budge went up to the farmhouse. The news of the

shutdown made Joshua Kimball indignant.

"Easy to tell who's behind 'em," he commented. "As the Scripture says about Esau and Jacob, the hands may belong to Ben Skinner and Zach Brewster and Les Shaw, but the voice is the voice of Milo Grannitt and Ches Legore. They've certainly got it in for you boys. Here's hopin' you beat 'em!"

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Lane soon had his attorney on the telephone, and the latter promptly arranged for another hearing

before Judge Dilloway.

"Lucky we caught him just now!" said the lawyer.

"He was going away day after to-morrow on a week's fishing trip, and you'd have had to shut down until he got back. He's a fair man and he won't stand for any fooling. I'll put a flea in his ear, so that he won't grant another injunction against your mill without looking at the case above, underneath, and on both sides, and turning it inside out in the bargain."

Lawton was as good as his word. When the hearing came off the next afternoon, he struck out straight from the shoulder. Grannitt lost his temper, which didn't help his case any. The selectmen, flushed and embarrassed, squirmed uneasily under the young lawyer's keen questioning. The judge's attitude showed

that he understood the matter completely.

"Now, Mr. Grannitt," said he, "I can't see but that these boys are entirely within their rights. It looks to me like a plain case of unwarranted persecution. Don't ask me to grant any more injunctions without hearing both sides, for I won't do it."

"But, Your Honor—" began the flustered attorney. The judge cut him short. He was indignant, and showed it.

"I've no more time to waste listening to trumpedup charges against these young men. The injunction is vacated."

The Barham counselor left the room baffled and angry, and the discomfited selectmen followed him.

"Well, Ches," remarked Grannitt in his office that night, "I've played my last trump and my hand's about empty. It's up to you now."

"Don't you worry, Milo! I've got a whole handful left. I don't waste no time in talkin' or bluffin'.

When I hit at all, I hit hard."

Legore's voice had risen almost to a shout. The attorney lifted a warning hand.

"Don't speak so loud," he cautioned. "There

may be somebody under the window."

"Nobody could get within earshot of us in this creaky old shack without our hearin' him a mile off. Besides, what's the difference! I'm out for the scalps of them fellers, an' I don't care if everybody in town knows it. It's nothin' I'm ashamed of or want to cover up. You ten-dollar-for-a-ten-cent-job lawyers like to do things in a quiet, sneaky way, whether it's needed or not."

"I don't believe in going after a man with a brass band when you can get to him just as well with a tin whistle," responded the attorney, tartly. "It's about time you were showing up some of those trumps you've been telling about, if you've really got 'em to play."

The lumberman's eyes grew steely. He cast a meaning look upon Grannitt.

"Do you really want to know what's next on the docket?" he demanded.

"No," returned the attorney, hastily, "I don't. And what's more, when you're outside this office I want you to keep your mouth shut about my connection with this case."

That night the boys went out on the lake in Jim's new boat. The evening was clear and beautiful. As they rowed across the placid waters with slowly dipping oars, the sunset died redly out behind the western pines and the stars began to glimmer brightly in the deep blue overhead.

Budge's mercurial temperament was down almost to zero. The strain of the past two weeks was telling

upon him.

"I'm afraid you fellows 'll blame me for getting you into such a pickle," he said. "Everything seems to be striking us at once. Strange! And we were expecting a quiet summer! Who'd have ever dreamed, thirty days back, that we'd be in such a mix-up? Wonder if it's like that all through life! I hardly know which way to turn. I'm getting so tired and disgusted with the whole thing that I'm almost ready to quit."

"Brace up, Budge!" encouraged Jim. "About every business I know anything of looks good on the outside; you have to get into it to learn its bad points. The man who's got the shoe on is the only one who knows where it pinches. Everybody thinks his own

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work is the hardest, and that it's the other fellow who's having the soft snap. But I guess things are averaged up pretty well."

"Remember, fellows," offered Percy, "that if worst comes to worst, I've one thing up my sleeve that's hard to beat, and that's John P. Whittington."

"No, Perce," declined Jim, "if your father helped us we'd have to pay him sometime. It 'd simply mean putting it off and adding interest. We've got to fight this through ourselves now. Try never was beat yet. We're not going to let a crooked pair like Legore and Grannitt drive or frighten us away. We've got just as good a right here as they have. And we're going to stay."

Out of the depths of the black forest to the west of the lake came the crack of a rifle. Percy pricked up his ears.

"Who's shooting at this time of night, and what's he firing at?"

Nobody had any explanation to offer, and they heard no second report.

Two days passed quietly. Matters at the mill could not have gone better. Sometime in the second night Budge woke suddenly. There was no moon, and a cloudy sky made it black under the pines. Maliber's hound was howling dismally. As Lane turned over to go to sleep again, Jim sat up in his bunk.

"What do you suppose Jack is making such a fuss about?" he asked. "I thought I heard somebody

prowling round outside, but I guess 'twas imagination."

Both listened, but only the melancholy baying of the dog came to their ears. Soon they were buried again in dreamless slumber.

## XIII

#### THE HEAD-HUNTER

SOMEBODY was coming in to the mill from the county road. At intervals between the raucous shrieks of the saw a whistle could be heard, growing shriller and louder. Soon Buncy's lank, lathy figure swung into the clearing. His lantern jaws were working furiously and his face wore a look half quizzical, half serious.

"Had to come, boys," he said. "I've got the

habit and I can't keep away."

"Well," responded Budge, resignedly, but with a

slight sinking at heart, "what is it this time?"

"I'm a head-hunter," answered the deputy. "You've heard about them natives of Borneo and other Eastern islands. When they get tired of doin' nothing, they go out on the warpath after heads to smoke in their wigwams. So long as they get the heads, it doesn't matter much whether the owners were their enemies or their friends. That's the errand I'm on to-day, and anything that's got a head had better stand from under. Can I steal a shovel?"

"Wonder where this bolt of lightning's going to hit," thought Budge. Aloud he said: "Help your-

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self. Right there, leaning against the water barrel. But what's a shovel got to do with head-hunting? I should think you'd rather have an ax."

"I might if I was goin' to do any cuttin'," returned the officer, cryptically, bestowing a meaning wink on Percy, who was staring at him open-mouthed. "But somebody else's been thoughtful enough to save me that trouble. So a shovel'll be all I'll need."

He walked across the driveway on the brow toward the sawdust pile at the end of the mill. His jesting mood had passed; his face turned suddenly serious and the lines of his jaw were sharply defined. The shriek of the saw ceased; Budge stopped a log half-way along the stringers; Throppy turned from his boiler; and Percy and Doggett suspended work on the boards. Every eye in the mill followed the deputy.

The sawoust heap at a point a few feet above its base was black with flies. As Buncy noticed the swarming insects, a satisfied expression appeared on

his features.

"Looks as it this was the place for me to dig," he remarked.

Without further enlightening the puzzled boys, he began to wield his shovel briskly, throwing the sawdust to right and left. The flies buzzed and hovered; the hole deepened. Suddenly with a dull thud the iron blade struck something.

Buncy stopped. Triumph and regret struggled for mastery on his face. He beckoned to the millmen.

"Guess I was told right," he said. "This way, everybody! Might as well have plenty of witnesses."

The entire crew gathered about him near the foot

of the heap.

"Now watch sharp!" he directed, as he resumed

his digging.

A black object, like the tip of an irregular, crooked limb, appeared, sticking up through the sawdust. In striking it the blade recoiled springily. The crowd of observers clustered more closely about the digger. Little by little the limb was uncovered, and then another close beside it. Nobody said anything; Buncy's occupation was too absorbing to admit of speech.

The sawdust flew; the flies buzzed. Soon the hole was deep enough to show that the two branches sprouted from a blackish-brown surface at the bottom of the shallow pit. Buncy began carefully digging around it. Percy was the first to recognize

the outlines.

"Why, it's a moose head!" he exclaimed.

The deputy shot a keen glance at him.

"Strange you should hit it first off!" he commented, a trace of sarcasm in his voice.

Percy did not notice the other's satirical tone; he

was staring at the grisly apparition.

"I believe it's the head of the very fellow that chased me!" he ejaculated. "I remember just how he looked."

Buncy chuckled mirthlessly. He favored Percy with a knowing wink.

## THE HEAD-HUNTER

"I'd give anything if I had your nerve," said he.
"It 'd be mighty useful to me in my business."

"What do you mean?" demanded Percy, wonder-

ingly.

But the deputy would vouchsafe nothing further. Giving a grunt, he continued digging. Soon the entire head was exposed, caked and clotted with gore and sawdust, where it had been cut off at the neck. Dropping the shovel, Buncy grasped the antlers, swung his prize from the hole, and dropped it on the sawdust slope. Then he straightened up and looked about triumphantly.

"Well, boys," he observed, "what do you think now of my being a head-hunter? Not so crazy as

you thought I was, am I?"

The mill crew stared in silence at the grim, black, severed head. The flies buzzed more thickly. Throppy was the first to speak.

"Gee!" he exclaimed. "Somebody must have shot him, cut off his head, and buried it in the saw-

dust!"

"Yes, I guess somebody did," jeered the deputy. He dropped his facetious tone and looked straight at Percy.

"What did I tell you?" he asked, reproachfully.

The boy started back, comprehension flickering across his face.

"Why, why," he stammered incredulously, "you don't think I killed him, do you?"

"Sorry to say so, but it looks mighty like it,"

replied Buncy. "I didn't want to come out here on this errand, but I had to. I've got to enforce the law, whether it pleases me or not. I'm only the instrument in its hands, as this shovel is in mine. I warned you what it would mean to shoot a moose in close time. You took your chances, as you said you would, and you've got caught. Now you'll have to face the music. That's all there is to it, so far as I can see."

"But I didn't do it," denied Percy, stoutly.

Buncy shook his head, still incredulous.

"It looks bad for you," he said. "Remember all the talk you made about what you'd do when you ran across him? Remember your target-shooting? There's your mark on that tree now."

He pointed across the clearing to the pine, drilled full of bullet holes.

"But I tell you I didn't do it," insisted the boy, a flush stealing up under his light hair. "I know I've shot off a lot of fool talk, and I've done a good deal of practicing with my rifle; and if I'd have met that moose when I had my twenty-two I'd probably have turned loose on him. But I never had the chance. I can bring witnesses to show where I've been every minute of the last three days. Besides, I heard a gun fired in the woods the other night, just before dark. If I'd killed him I'd be willing to stand up and take my medicine, no matter what it cost, without trying to lie out of it. Whatever other faults I may have, that's one thing I've never done and never will do."

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Relief struggled with bewilderment on the deputy's face.

"If you say you didn't, I'm mighty glad of it, and of course I believe you; but I'm afraid other people won't. Somebody must have shot that moose. Who did it, I'd like to know."

Budge started as if he had been pricked with a knife.

"Who?" he almost shouted. "I'll tell you. It was the same man that drove the spikes into those logs and cut that belt and has been making no end of trouble for us here from the very start. That's who!"

"Probably you're right," agreed the deputy. "Just the same, I've got to arrest your friend and take him before Justice Grannitt for a trial. I'm mighty sorry, but a complaint's been made and all the evidence points to him. I'm free to state that, when he says out and out that he didn't do it, I believe he's tellin' the truth. But that doesn't excuse me from bringin' him before the judge. You've satisfied me; but you've got to satisfy him. He's the doctor in this case."

Percy made a wry face at the thought of appearing before Grannitt.

"Fair trial I'll get from him!" he scoffed.

"Tell the truth and stick to it," advised the deputy.

"I'll go up to Kimball's and telephone Mr. Lawton to come out from Parcherville as quick as he can," said Budge.

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"I'll wait here till you get back," observed Buncy.
"Guess that won't be strainin' justice any. Meanwhile, I'll brush that head up with a broom. We'll
have to take it along with us as evidence."

Budge sped away on his motor cycle, and soon

returned.

"Lawton 'll be out right off," he reported. "He'll meet us at Grannitt's office in an hour."

The time dragged slowly. The boys had no heart to start working again about the mill. Soon it was time to go. The party prepared to embark in the old Ford belonging to two of the men. The moose head was fastened to one side of the car.

"Where's that drawin'?" inquired Buncy. "I

was told to fetch that, too."

Percy brought it from the cabin. Then he held out his wrists.

"Want to handcuff me?" he asked, half jokingly. Buncy frowned at such unseemly levity.

"You may not find this so much fun before you get

through," he responded.

As Budge began to crank the Ford, Merrithew came through the pines from his cabin. When he heard the story of Percy's arrest his usually calm blue eyes flashed with anger.

"I'll ride to the village with you, boys, if there's room for me," he said. "Don't know as I could do you any good, but I'd like to be on hand, just the

same."

"Glad to have you," responded Budge, heartily.



ON THE OTHER SIDE, PERCY, IN REPLY TO LAWTON'S QUERIES, FLATLY DENIED SHOOTING THE ANIMAL

## THE HEAD-HUNTER

It was a short, silent trip. At the Four Corners the hermit disembarked with the others; he stepped into Holway & Benner's.

"I won't go up into Grannitt's office unless you need me," he said. "I don't want to have any more

dealings with that man than I can help."

As they were entering the lawyer's stairway another auto drove up, and Lawton sprang out. The boys were glad to see him. A few quick questions and answers put him in possession of the facts. Together the party ascended the creaking steps leading to the justice's office.

Grannitt smiled sourly on seeing them, but there was a glint of malice in his eyes. He had not forgotten their last meeting before Judge Dilloway.

In a corner of the room sat McAuliffe, looking surlier and more disagreeable than ever. He nodded

scowlingly, but did not speak.

The hearing was brief. Buncy testified to finding the moose head in the sawdust pile. Under Grannitt's questioning McAuliffe told of Percy's target practice and of the threats he had made against the moose. Much to the boys' surprise, he gave his testimony with apparent unwillingness. On the other side, Percy, in reply to Lawton's queries, flatly denied shooting the animal, though acknowledging the facts to which McAuliffe had testified.

Grannitt rendered his decision with unmistakable relish.

"This is a serious matter," he said. "The laws

of Maine prescribe that no moose shall be shot in close time. Somebody undoubtedly killed this animal."

He indicated the gory head, which had been brought up and deposited in a corner of his office.

"All the facts in the case," he continued, "point to Mr. Whittington. I am not expressing a personal opinion as to whether he is guilty or not. But I am bound to enforce the law to the best of my ability in the light of the evidence I now have at hand. On the one side stands the testimony of Mr. McAuliffe to the threats made by the accused and to his shooting at the target brought into court; and we have also the acknowledgment of the prisoner himself. On the other side there is only his flat denial that he killed the animal. I cannot see that there is anything for me to do but to pronounce him guilty and to impose the full fine of two hundred dollars."

"Your Honor," requested Lawton, "I would like to have this hearing continued for two days, say until Friday morning at this time."

Grannitt demurred.

"I do not see what you would gain by that. Still, if you desire it, I will grant your request. Meanwhile I must put the prisoner under bonds for two hundred dollars."

The boys looked at one another and at Lawton.

"Does Your Honor think that the circumstances make this necessary?" inquired the attorney.

"I think that they do," answered Grannitt. "The

## THE HEAD-HUNTER

offense is a serious one and there would be a temptation for the accused, who is not a resident here, and who would be likely to have some difficulty in establishing his innocence, to leave the county. I should not feel justified in naming a lower figure."

"I'll go on his bond," offered Budge.

The suspicion of a sneer crossed Grannitt's leathery face, but his voice and manner were suave as ever.

"My brother attorney will instruct you," he replied, "that the bondsman must be a dweller in this county and must own real estate here. You can comply with neither of these requirements."

"Will you give us a half hour to secure a bonds-

man?" asked Lawton.

Grannitt unwillingly consented.

"You will be responsible for the prisoner?" said he, looking at Buncy.

"I will," replied the deputy.

The party adjourned to the sidewalk in front of the office.

"Who'll we get?" asked Budge.

"I'll be glad to go on the bond," said a voice.

Surprised, the boys turned and faced McAuliffe. Nobody spoke for a moment. The discharged mill-man looked embarrassed.

"Much obliged," said Budge, rather coldly, "but

I guess we'd better find somebody else."

McAuliffe turned on his heel and walked off, scowling more blackly than ever. Merrithew came across the street from Holway & Benner's.

"How would I do?" he offered. "I own enough

real estate to qualify me."

The boys accepted him gladly. Grannitt, on being notified, gave a grudging assent. The bond was drawn and signed and Percy was free once more.

"I'll go home now," said Lawton. case that 'll keep me busy this afternoon and all tomorrow; but I'll be out early the next day."

The boys, accompanied by Buncy, returned to the

mill. The deputy struck his hands together.

"Can you put me up to-night, boys?" he asked. "I've an idea. To-morrow we'll try it out and see if it works."

#### XIV

#### SILENT WITNESSES

WORK in the mill itself was suspended the next forenoon, though the choppers and haulers kept busy. Percy's acquittal was of far more importance than the sawing of six thousand feet of boards. As soon as breakfast was over Buncy proceeded to put his plan into execution.

"Where's that hound?" he inquired.

"Out chasing rabbits, I guess," answered Budge. "Joe Maliber can probably tell you where to find him."

"Hunt him up, will you? We'll need him this mornin'."

"What do you want him for?"

"Never mind now. You'll see later."

Although puzzled by the deputy's request, Budge and Percy started out in search of Jack. They found him not far from where his master was chopping, and soon returned, dragging the woebegone beast by his collar, tail between his legs. Fastening Jack to the end of a long strap, Buncy led him to the sawdust pile.

"Now," he explained, "we've got to find the rest

of that moose, and we want this dog to help us. That head must have been brought here and buried two or three nights ago. I don't know whether or not the hound can trail it to the body, but I'm goin' to have him try."

The boys fell in with the proposal at once.

"Bully for you!" exclaimed Budge. "Now, Jack, see if you can pay us for that pork roast you stole a few weeks ago!"

Jack seemed to understand what was wanted of him. After he had sniffed inquiringly at the spadehole for a few seconds, Buncy led him round the

base of the pile.

"I'm in hopes he may pick up the trail. That head must have bled more or less, after it was cut off; and perhaps we can find an occasional footprint or drop of blood to help us. It's lucky there's been no rain for three or four days."

"Why do you want to find the body?" asked Throppy. "I don't see how that 'll help Perce any."

"Maybe it won't and maybe it will," replied the deputy. "At any rate it won't cost anything to try."

At first the hound ran to and fro aimlessly; evidently he found it difficult to pick up the scent.

Buncy, however, was not discouraged.

"It 'll be faintest at this end of the trail," he said.

"The nearer the body we get, the easier to follow it ought to be. If we can only pick it up for the first few hundred feet, we oughtn't to have much trouble about findin' the rest of it."

Stooping over, Jim began looking for footprints in the underbrush on the side of the pile away from the mill.

"Whoever orought that head in," he suggested, "would keep as far as he could from the camps, for fear we might hear him."

"That's the idea!" exclaimed Buncy.

The land beyond the heap was rather low and swampy. Spreading out among the trees, the boys began to scrutinize the ground sharply, taking good care not to obliterate any possible tracks. Percy was the first to make a discovery.

"Here's a footprint!" he shouted. "And here's a drop of blood right beyond it! We've hit the trail!"

The mark of a boot heel was unmistakable; so was the drop of dried blood. The searchers felt encouraged. Jack was dragged forward, and his nose held down to the place. Confining their search to a narrower area, the boys advanced in a fan-shaped line, eyes on the alert for footprints, blood, or broken twigs.

In less than two minutes there was a yell from

Throppy.

"I've found another!"

Sure enough, ten feet ahead there was a second

blood drop, and near it a broken clump of fern.

Jack was made to sniff this spot likewise. Though he seemed to know what was expected of him, and apparently did his best, he was not a brilliant success as a bloodhound. The scent was too faint and the drops too far apart.

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Jim discovered the next trace in a hollow five yards farther on. Little by little the trail was picked up, now rapidly, now more slowly. A hundred yards from the clearing it led into one of the wood roads, followed that for some distance, and then struck straight for the base of Nebo Mountain. As Buncy had foretold, the drops of blood became more frequent, and the dog had now little difficulty in following them. Indeed, they were plainly visible to all the seachers.

"Gettin' warm!" remarked the deputy. "'Twon't be long now before we find the body. It can't be much farther away."

Presently they came to a deep gully with a pile of brush at its bottom. With an excited baying Jack suddenly wrenched himself loose from the strap and darted down the slope. In a moment he was snuffing and pawing at the brush. Then he raised his head and gave utterance to a long, melancholy howl.

"He's found it," exclaimed Buncy. "It's down

there!"

The tangled mass of boughs was pulled apart and the object of their search lay revealed. It was not an inviting sight.

"Well!" said Jim. "Here's the moose! What

next?"

Buncy produced a keen-bladed knife.

"We've a little job of dissection on hand. Anybody want to volunteer as surgeon?"

Nobody did.

"Then," said the deputy, "I s'pose I've got to tackle it myself. Let's see where he was hit!"

He stooped over the headless body.

"What are you after?" asked Jim.
"The bullet that killed him. Unless

"The bullet that killed him. Unless it went clean through him, it 'll be lodged against some bone."

He cut and prodded, while the boys looked on. At

last he gave an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Here 'tis! Right against the backbone! Watch me take it out, all of you! You may be needed as witnesses."

Removing the gory, irregular lump of lead, he dropped it into an envelope which he put carefully in his pocket.

"That may be worth two hundred dollars to you," said he to Percy, "besides savin' you lots of trouble. Well, let's be gettin' back to the mill!"

"What are you going to do with the body?" asked

Budge.

"Let it stay here! Guess we can bury it!"

The bank of the gully turned out to be soft, and the moose was soon covered deep with moss and rocks and earth.

"Now," said Buncy, "let's go!"

As they walked back to the camp, he volunteered nothing further about the bullet; but apparently he was well satisfied with the result of the expedition, for now and then he broke into a whistle. And with this the boys had to content themselves for the present. They soon reached the clearing.

"Might as well start her again, fellows!" advised the sheriff. "You can get in three-quarters of a day, anyway. I'm goin' up to Kimball's to telephone Mr. Lawton. He'll be glad enough to hear what I've found."

Soon operations at the mill were once more under full swing. Though the boys could not understand the reason for Buncy's cheerfulness, they had confidence in him and felt sure that Percy would establish his innocence. The remainder of the day passed without incident and they went to sleep early.

At seven the next morning work started as usual. The hearing had been continued until ten o'clock that day and the boys desired to do as much as possible before setting out for Grannitt's office.

At about eight an automobile began honking loudly

in the direction of the county road.

"Why's that fellow making so much noise?" exclaimed Budge. "S'pose he's in trouble and wants help?"

The sound drew nearer. Evidently the car was coming in through the wood road. Soon a big machine emerged cautiously into the clearing. It was driven by a chauffeur in livery and carried a stout man as single passenger on its back seat.

The minute he espied its occupant Percy gave a yell.

"Dad!"

Sure enough it was John P. Whittington. His black felt hat was crushed down over his

square head, and his visage was as red as ever. An unlighted cigar was gripped firmly between his teeth. His face wore a somewhat stern look, shaded with apprehension. He shook hands with Percy and the other boys.

"So this 's your mill," he said. "Percy wrote me

about it."

His keen eyes wandered observantly over the clearing, then came back to his son. The latter, bronzed, burned, pitchy and ragged, would hardly have graced a drawing-room, but J. P.'s look as it dwelt on his heir was not devoid of a certain satisfaction and pride.

"Where you from, Dad?" inquired Percy.

"The White Mountains. Had a hard ride across. These roads!"

"Wish I might have driven you," said Percy, his eyes enviously scanning the graceful outlines of the

big car.

"I'm glad you didn't," said J. P., emphatically, biting at his cigar. "I rode with you once. I got out alive. That was enough. I'd rather walk. Next time I might not be so lucky."

Percy flushed.

"I'm not so bad," he said. "I've never killed

myself or anybody else yet."

"Always has to be a first time," rejoined his father. "And I don't want to be there when it comes."

Somewhat stiffly he disembarked from the car and

accompanied the boys to their cabin. Sitting down, he pulled a folded newspaper from his pocket.

"Now," said he, fixing his eyes on Percy, "what

have you got to say about this?"

Unfolding the paper, he passed it to his son. Its front page bore the following glaring headlines:

# MILLIONAIRE'S SON BREAKS THE MAINE LAW J. P. WHITTINGTON, JR., SHOOTS BULL MOOSE IN CLOSE TIME

"That's good advertising for you and for me, isn't it?" continued the railroad magnate, without waiting for any reply. "Why did you do it? I got up early this morning and saw that in the evening paper. So I came right across. I'd hoped you'd gotten over your foolishness. Well, I suppose it's up to me to foot the bills!"

"But I didn't do it," indignantly denied Percy.

"And I don't want you to settle any fine for me.
I'm going to fight this out myself."

J. P. cast a long look at his son. What he saw in

the latter's eye satisfied him.

"All right, Percy," he said. "I'll take your word for it. If you say you didn't shoot that moose, you didn't. We both know to our cost that you've got some failings, but I've never yet known you to lie. Somebody's evidently got a grudge against you. Fight it out and I'll stand behind you till the last gun's fired!"

With Budge acting as spokesman, and the others putting in an occasional word, the boys told J. P. about their trouble with Legore and Grannitt. The millionaire listened attentively.

"Yes," said he at the close, "I see just how it is. I've met men of that type before. Some have had a lot of money and some haven't had so much. They'll down you if they can, by fair means or foul.

Stick to it, boys!"

While they were talking, Lawton came into the camp and was introduced to Mr. Whittington. After a few minutes' conversation, the lawyer went out for a private interview with Buncy. The millionaire expressed his emphatic approval of the boys' attorney.

"He's a good man. He'll clear you, Perce, if any-

body can."

While waiting until it was time to start for Grannitt's office, Mr. Whittington strolled about the clearing, filling his lungs with the bracing pine air. The boys set the mill going, and sawed a few logs to show him just how the plant was operated. J. P. was much interested in the duties of each, and particularly in those of Percy.

"Some different from where you were last summer, isn't it?" said he to Jim. "Should think you'd

notice it more than any of the others."

"I do," replied Jim. "But not so much as I did at first."

"We've got a hermit here," said Percy. "You

ought to meet him. He's the man that kept me out of jail."

He told the story of Merrithew's going on his bond.

J. P. pricked up his ears.

"Merrithew! Merrithew! I knew a man by that name once. I'd like to see him and thank him."

"I'll go over after him," offered Throppy.

In a few minutes he was knocking at the recluse's door.

"Percy's father is here," he said, breathlessly, "and he'd like to meet you."

A shadow darkened the hermit's face; he shook

his head decidedly.

"I don't care to meet him," he said, with finality. Throppy, surprised and disappointed, hardly knew what to say.

"Why-why-" he stammered.

There was a red spot in Merrithew's cheeks and his voice shook a little.

"I'm sorry to seem discourteous, but I don't care to meet Mr. Whittington, either now or at any time later."

He went in and closed the door, leaving Throppy staring blankly at the cabin. Puzzled by the mystery, the boy did some close thinking as he wended his way back to the mill.

"Mr. Merrithew doesn't care to come over," he

reported.

The faces of the boys showed their surprise. J. P.'s lips tightened, but he said nothing. By this time

Lawton and Buncy had finished their interview in the pines, and the moment had arrived for starting for the ten-o'clock hearing at Grannitt's office.

"Climb into my machine and I'll take you over," said the millionaire. "Guess it's big enough to hold

everybody."

"Where's your twenty-two?" asked Buncy of Percy. "And that box of longs, too? We'll need 'em for evidence."

Percy brought out the rifle and the cartridges. In a short time they reached the Four Corners. Getting out in front of the lawyer's office, they ascended the creaking stairs and entered Grannitt's sanctum.

The attorney greeted them with a curt nod, his glance dwelling for a moment on the square jaw and red visage of J. P., puffing from his climb. Percy's father returned the justice's glare with interest. From the first the two knew that they were enemies.

The party ranged themselves before Grannitt, who, seated unconcernedly in the armchair behind his dusty table, lighted his perennial cigar. He looked distinctly bored. To him the trial was merely a matter of form. Apparently he had no question of Percy's guilt.

Before the formal opening of the case there was some preliminary conversation between Lawton and the justice. Mr. Whittington, chewing his unlighted cigar, listened impatiently to the dialogue, in which his son was referred to as "the prisoner" and "the accused." At last he could stand it no longer.

"But the boy says he didn't do it!" he burst out. "And I know he's telling the truth."

Grannitt permitted himself to smile sourly.

"This is a court duly established by the statutes of the state. Belief cuts no figure here; evidence is the only thing that counts. I do not question that you believe your son innocent; but to prove it is quite another thing."

J. P. subsided. Grannitt glanced toward Lawton. "Have you anything new to bring forward in this case?" he asked.

"Yes, Your Honor, we have, most assuredly. May I borrow your letter scale?"

Grannitt, with an ill-concealed sneer, nodded assent. Lawton looked toward Buncy, who stood leaning against the wall, holding Percy's twenty-two. Breaking open the gun, the deputy withdrew a loaded shell. With the aid of his knife point he extracted the bullet and passed it to Lawton, who laid it before the wondering justice. Buncy then drew an envelope from his pocket and handed it to the lawyer; Lawton shook it over the table and a battered slug dropped out.

"Your Honor," began the young attorney, "I asked for a continuance in the hope of being able to discover new evidence that might shed some light on this case. We have here two additional and very

material witnesses."

He indicated the lumps of lead.

"The smaller, which Mr. Buncy has just removed

from the rifle belonging to the accused, is the largest bullet that it can carry. The second was taken by Mr. Buncy from the body of the moose and caused his death."

He dropped the pellet from the cartridge on the letter scale; it barely moved the needle. Taking it off, he put in its place the irregular lump of lead; the black arrow jumped to a third of an ounce.

"The twenty-two long weighs thirty-five grains; the other piece of lead is almost five times as heavy. What sort of a gun should you say it came from, Mr.

Buncy?"

"A thirty-thirty Winchester," replied the deputy. Lawton looked toward Grannitt.

"Either that moose was killed by a ball from some gun heavier than the prisoner's rifle, or five bullets from this twenty-two struck in precisely the same spot and formed a single mass of lead, a thing practically impossible. We rest our case here and ask that the accused be acquitted."

Grannitt could not prevent his face from showing the disappointment he felt. He questioned Buncy sharply; but the deputy, satisfaction lurking in his eyes, took good care that his testimony did not weaken Lawton's statement of the case. So the only course left open to the unwilling justice was to discharge Percy.

As the triumphant millmen left the room Budge hit Percy a resounding thump on the back. Out through the entry they crowded, and down the rick-

ety stairs, J. P. bringing up the rear. As they filed out on the sidewalk Budge caught sight of a familiar figure in a checked suit, standing in front of Holway & Benner's. He nudged Jim.

"There's Legore! Hanging round to crow over us.

He won't this time."

The name caught J. P.'s ear just as he emerged from the doorway. Without a second's hesitation he walked across the road toward the scowling lumberman. Legore saw him coming, but stood his ground. The millionaire wasted no time in beating about the bush.

"Why don't you let these boys alone? You're liable to get into trouble if you don't."

Hard Cash reddened with anger.

"See here, Mister Man," he snorted, "I won't make believe I don't know who you are; but let me tell you something. Outside, in the place where you came from, you may be a pretty big toad, but you don't cut no ice in this particular puddle. See? You may own railroads, but you don't own Barham. I've got this little town in my vest pocket, an' it'll take a bigger man than you with all your money to steal it from me. We're not running this place for the benefit of these boys, or you, either. An' if you or they don't like the way things are goin' here, there's plenty of roads to get out by."

They glared at each other for a moment. Neither man dropped his eyes. At last J. P. turned away and

climbed into his automobile.

"Made a fool of myself," he said to the boys as they sped back toward the mill. "Well, it isn't the first time, and it probably won't be the last. He was right; he amounts to something here and I don't. Watch him, boys!"

A half hour later he was on his way back to the White Mountains and work at the mill had fallen

into its usual routine.

## XV

#### IRESON'S RIDE

WHEN Throppy pulled the knocking-off whistle that night, Henry Ireson, the yardman, stopped his pair in front of the mill and began fussing about his nigh horse.

"What's the trouble?" asked Budge.

"Dick's fallen lame. See this!"

It was a big swelling on the back of the animal's

right fore leg just above the ankle.

"Looks bad, doesn't it?" said Ireson. "But I guess I know what the matter is. A man doesn't own a hundred or more horses without learning a little about 'em. Somebody must have a grudge against me."

Drawing a small pair of tweezers from his pocket, he began probing the bunch, while Dick flinched and stamped restlessly. At last with an ejaculation of

triumph he pulled out a black strand.

"Horse hair! That was threaded through his leg between the cord and the bone to start a sore. Pretty mean trick on the horse! Now that it's out, the swelling 'll go down quick."

"How did you know the hair was inside?" asked

Jim.

"Oh, I've traded in horses all my life, and I've bought my knowledge. Some of it has come pretty high. I've had all sorts of experiences, some funny, and some not so funny. You've read Whittier's poem called 'Ireson's Ride'?"

"I've heard it recited a dozen times," said Jim.

"Well, Ireson was a distant relative of my father's. Whittier didn't give him a fair deal. When he sailed away from that vessel in Chaleur Bay with his own townsmen aboard, he didn't know she was sinking, or he'd never have abandoned her. He was too much of a man to do such a thing. But that's gone by years ago and the right and wrong of it have been settled somewhere else. Want me to tell you about an Ireson's ride of another sort? It's one I took myself on a fall night behind a horse I'd been swindled into buying."

"Nothing 'd please us better," said Budge.

"All right! I'll be round after supper to-night, when I've looked out for my team."

The mosquitoes drove the boys under cover at an early hour that evening. Shortly afterward Ireson came in, and began his story.

"How would you like to drive a horse ninety years

old?

"One spring I paid thirty-five dollars for a sorrel named Charley, just turned eight years. He was a good horse, easily worth a couple of hundred, until an

accidental jump from a back barn-door knocked out his 'stifle.' The bone made a bunch as big as your fist on the front of his off hind leg. He could lie down on his right side; but when it came to rising he had to sit up like a dog, and lift himself by putting his left foot under him.

"Charley was a willing worker. He couldn't road very fast; but he was all right for short drives. He was worth the thirty-five and more.

"Early one September day I harnessed Charley into my new Corinna wagon, and started for Parcherville. I had as passengers Ben Sykes and Uncle Mose Ringhorn.

"Ben was my cousin five or ten times removed. Mose wasn't my uncle any more than he was my great-grandfather. We couldn't have traced any relationship this side the *Mayflower*; we'd probably have had to go at least as far back as Adam. Mose couldn't claim even a fortieth cousin in Barham Four Corners, but everybody 'Uncled' him. He had a thorn in the flesh. Most of the time he could talk well enough; but get him excited and he would stutter worse than a gasoline launch.

"We wore down the miles and reached Parcherville at dinner time. Ben found that his business would keep him there till the next day. By the time Uncle Mose and I were ready to start for home Charley had stiffened up, and I saw we'd either have to stay in town that night or get a better horse.

"So about dark we drove into the stable of Sid

Ruggles, the worst thief that ever lived, barring none. Sid grinned when he saw me. If the Devil should ever lose his front teeth, he'd pass for Sid's twin. And it wouldn't be any great of a mistake, either.

"'Hello, Sid!' said I. 'When did they let you out of state's prison? I want a horse, a good driver. What've you got to trade?'

"Sid rubbed his hands, and grinned wider than

ever.

"'Now ain't that lucky! I've got exactly what you want.'

"He pointed to a white horse that had just come

into the yard.

"'How'll he suit ye? Only six hours from Green-

port!

"Forty miles! That wasn't so bad; neither was the horse—in the dark. But I filed an objection, on principle.

"Guess he won't take us to Barham Four Corners"

to-night, if he's just come from Greenport.'

"(As a matter of fact he hadn't; but I didn't know

it then.)

"'Oh yes, he will!' lied Sid, cheerfully. "I think a heap of that horse. And there's nobody I'd ruther

see have him than you.'

"Coming from Sid, this wasn't much of a compliment. I took a lantern, and skinned up the beast's lip. His upper teeth seemed to be good and he appeared to be twelve or fifteen years old. I didn't

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look at his under jaw. I wasn't thinking of under jaws just then, but of getting home,

"Meanwhile Sid had been running his eye and

hands over Charley.

"Well?' said I.

"'Three dollars to boot,' he proposed.

"I laughed at him. He swore up and down—and it was some swearing—that he wouldn't take a cent less. We wrestled it out and finally broke even.

"'What's his name?' I asked.

"Whenever I get a new horse I always like to be

properly introduced.

"Sid hemmed and hawed. Where he had had the animal long enough to become so fond of him, it seemed strange to me that he should hesitate on his name.

"Buster,' answered he at last.

"I slipped my harness off Charley, buckled it on Buster, and backed him into my new wagon. Everything went slick as grease. Only, as we drove out of the stable it seemed to me that Sid grinned. But the light was so dim I couldn't be sure.

"Once on the street, Buster began to beat from

one side to the other. Says Uncle Mose:

"'We'll go home a-fluking."

"I didn't feel quite so certain of that.

"'Mustn't crow too soon, Ringhorn,' said I. 'You haven't seen so many of these old fellows as I have.'

"The horse wanted to go into everybody's dooryard. I judged he must have been a fish peddler.

We seesawed out to Porktown Flat, and, as usual, he turned into the first driveway. The time seemed ripe for a little moral suasion.

"I took out the whip and lammed him one.

"He made two jumps and then balked, landing stiff legged.

"When he stopped I started. I bucked the dasher and flattened it straight down on the whiffletree.

"What I said isn't worth mentioning here.

"We both took hold and straightened up the dasher. Plying the whip freely, I ran Buster down the hill and across a bridge; there he balked again.

"'Got a knife, Uncle?' asked I.

"'What for?' says Mose.

"'I want to cut this crowbait's throat and push him off the bridge.'

"But neither of us had a knife, and the lack of one

was that old slacker's only salvation.

"We got out. I dragged Buster by the bits, while Mose pushed behind the wagon, carrying on a conversation with himself. It was a ten-rod hill and we moved a little better than ten feet a minute, so it took us about a quarter hour to reach the top.

"By this time it was past nine. We had started

before eight and had gone less than two miles.

"Just beyond the summit was a house, all dark; everybody had gone to bed. I went up and knocked, to see if I couldn't get the owner to take us to Barham Four Corners.

"It wasn't any use. He wouldn't open up, but

talked to me through the door; said his horse wasn't

able to go. So we had to keep on.

"It was getting late, and I began to feel that, be it ever so humble, there was no place like home. It was Saturday night and I couldn't help thinking of the steaming pot of hot baked beans in my oven. I would have given considerable boot if I could have swapped Buster for those beans.

"We called at five houses. But nobody would come to the door. Not one had a horse able to take us to Barham Four Corners at that time of night. There were more old, sick, and feeble animals on that road than I had ever dreamed of. I was get-

ting desperate.

"The sixth house stood high up on a bank. I rapped, and the dog answered. By and by a man's voice growled:

"'What d'ye want out there?"

"My knocking must have broken his beauty sleep; he talked as cordially as if his mouth was full of

gravel.

"'Our horse is sick,' said I. 'We'd like to leave him here and hire somebody to take us to Barham Four Corners to-night. We'll pay anything in reason.'

"'Well, I can't go!' snaps he, short and anything but sweet.

"It made me feel unpleasant. I wanted to get even with him somehow. Says I:

"Has this house any cellar drain?"

"'Of course it has! What a blamed fool question to ask!"

"'Well, I thought you must be a blamed fool if it hadn't.'

"Down in the road Uncle Mose was having a fit or something of the sort. It sounded as if he had swallowed the entire lot of consonants in the alphabet and was trying to get them up and out all at once. At last he got the better of his tongue.

"'Come away,' he warned, 'or he'll shoot ye!"

"I came away. And we kept on. But it was a long, long way to Tipperary. The road seemed to be made of India rubber. It was as if somebody had hold of the other end and was stretching every mile out to five.

"That old, wooden-legged centipede set one foot before the other as if he was testing a bridge of rotten planks. The only reason he moved at all was that it was easier for him to fall forward than to stand still.

"'S'pose we'd get ahead any faster if we turned this old plug round and backed him?' asked Ringhorn.

"I tried to whale him along, but he had a hide like a rhinoceros. He simply came to a dead halt and looked round at me as if he thought I was tickling him with an ostrich feather. Finally I stopped licking him. I didn't want to wear out the whip.

"Uncle Mose lost his temper; he shook his fist at

the horse.

"'D-d-d-d-' he began.

"I stopped him.

"'Hold on, Uncle,' said I. 'Don't abuse the alphabet so much; it's never done anything to you. I know what you want to say, and I've been saying it myself inside for the last two hours a good deal better and stronger than you can. If swearing would have helped us we'd have been home long ago. Cut it out!'

"Mose did. An owl hooted lonesomely from the spruces. I dropped the whip back into its socket and let Buster take his own gait. I was beat, all in. We joggled along in the dark. Those beans were

growing cold.

"At about eleven we came to Ike Dixon's.

"Ike kept the wolf from his door by making and peddling soft soap and by trading horses. We crawled up into the yard and routed out Brother Ike.

"Pretty soon he showed up in his shirt sleeves, with a lantern. He was the homeliest man in four counties, cross eyed and red headed, with a high, squeaky voice; besides all that, he stuttered as bad or worse than Uncle Mose.

"'T-t-t-t-' he started in.

"'My horse is hungry,' I said, 'and I'd like him to have a feed.'

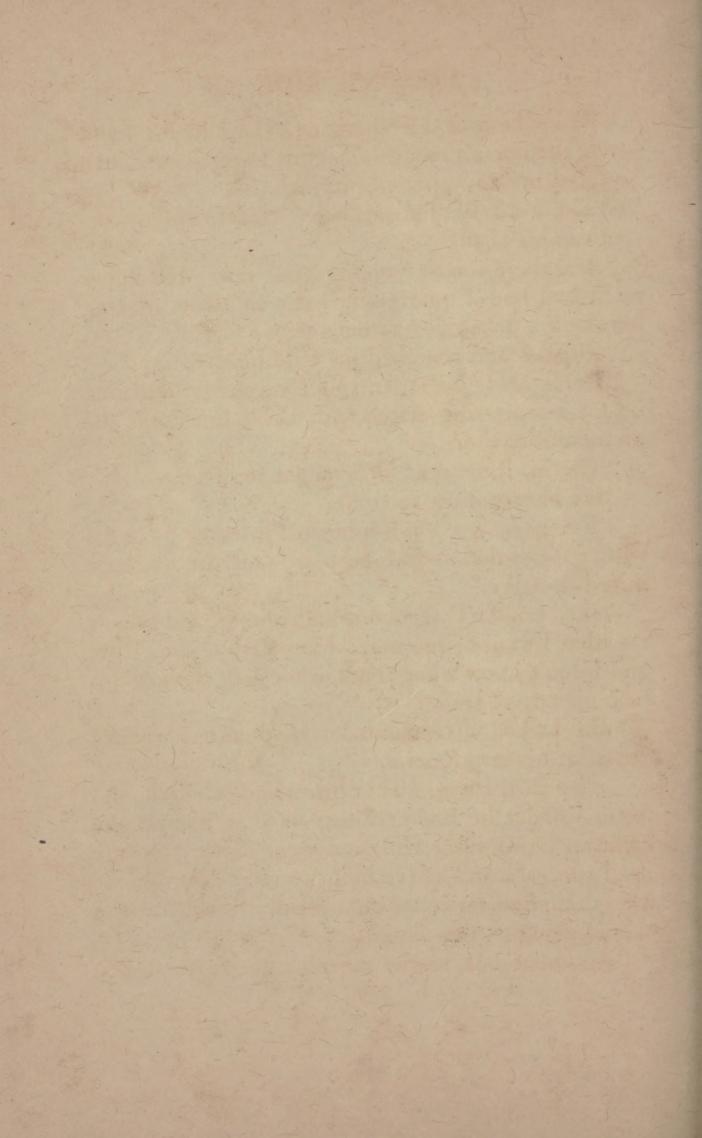
""Wh-wh-what do you want to g-g-g-give

"I guess gruel will about fit his case."

"We surprised Buster with two quarts of meal; he almost dropped dead, but recovered himself in time to surround the meal.



"NOT A T-T-TUT-TUT-TOOTH IN HIS HEAD"



"While he was Fletcherizing, Ike slid his hand inside the horse's mouth along his lower jaw. Then he faced me and grinned pityingly.

"K-k-k-k-k!" he cackled. 'Not a t-t-tut-tut-

tooth in his head!'

"And there wasn't—on his lower jaw. His upper teeth had had a quarter inch cut off them, making him look a dozen years younger.

"Ruggles had snatched me bald headed.

"Uncle Mose began to spit consonants, warming up for a stuttering match with Ike. But I cut the preliminaries short.

"Get in, Ringhorn! We've got to be going."

"Ike bantered me to trade.

"'I've g-g-g-got a h-h-h-horse I'll let ye have for f-f-five d-d-d-dollars to b-b-boot. Only he's a leetle

mite b-b-balky.'

"'Ike,' said I, 'I've got one balky horse, and I don't see what I want of another. I know what mine'll do, and I don't know what yours won't do. So how'll it help me any to trade?"

"Ike looked disappointed. He'd have swapped

horses at his own funeral.

"We inched along. That brute had strength, and it's a wonder he hadn't killed us that night. We came to Drinkwater Hill, and went down it on the dead run. Near a curve halfway to the bottom we hit a drain and for more than twenty feet the wagon skated along on two wheels.

"At about one in the morning we reached Ben

Sykes's. Ben, of course, was at Parcherville, but I felt sure his horse was in the barn. It was my plan to leave Buster there and drive the rest of the way home with Ben's horse.

"I turned into the yard, took Buster out, and started with him for the barn.

"It was empty.

"Afterwards I learned that Ben's wife had taken the horse that day and gone to visit her relatives in Smyrna.

"I didn't say anything—for publication.

"We harnessed Buster into the wagon again and started along. At least I started. Mose had had

enough.

"'Hen,' said he, sort of shamefaced, 'sorry to leave ye, but guess I'll have to walk ahead. I'm going to get up early and I'd like to be home in time to catch a few winks.'

"Don't blame you a bit, Uncle,' said I. 'I'd be glad to walk, too, if I could. But I've got to stick by

this traveling corpse until he's under cover.'

"Mose was cruel enough to break into a whistle as he stepped briskly out of the yard. Buster and I plugged along alone. We arrived home at half past two.

"I unharnessed the horse and put him down out of sight in the barn cellar. I was ashamed to have anybody see him. The fire in the stove had gone out long ago, and the beans were cold, but I made a good meal.

"Monday Ben returned from Parcherville and came over to see me.

"Ben,' said I, 'I've got a poultice for ye down cellar. Trade him off. Get what you can. I never

want to set eyes on him again.'

"Ben swapped Buster that very afternoon with old Sile Larkin at the foot of Butternut Hill for a horse that had the blind staggers, getting five dollars and a sheep to boot. I took the bill, and told him to keep the sheep for his commission. Then he traded the Larkin horse with Gid Barker for two sheep, a half dozen hens, and two-fifty in cash. I gave him the sheep and the hens.

"If ever a horse was ninety years old it was that

same Buster.

"What was he really worth?

"Nothing.

"But did I ever get even with Sid Ruggles?

"Did I?

"Jockeys never hold any hard feelings against one another; but I had my hatchet whetted for Sid.

"Somebody traded a horse off on me with a bad

case of glanders.

"I arranged with Ben Sykes to meet Ruggles at Ben's house in the evening. Just before I reached

the place I swabbed out the horse's nose.

"When I drove up I was in a tearing hurry. Didn't get out of the wagon, but dickered with my watch in my hand. Had to sit up that night with a sick man and was late already.

"Ruggles's horse was sound, good aged, and moderate turned, with no gray hairs. First he asked ten dollars to boot, then dropped to five. I laughed at him and started out of the yard.

"As I went I offered to trade even.

"At that I didn't care much. My man was awful sick and I couldn't wait. It was put up or shut up, and mighty quick too.

"Sid put up.

"I'll credit him with not really wanting to. It was against his principles, or what stood for 'em, to decide on a snap judgment.

"He looked rather sick when he saw me driving off

with his horse.

"Later he was sicker still.

"The town took away the horse he got from me, and had him killed."

Ireson drew a long breath; he glanced at the alarm clock on the shelf.

"Nine o'clock," he said. "Guess I'll take another look at Dick's leg before I turn in."

He bade the boys good-night, and went out.

"No horses for me," remarked Percy. "Rubber tires have it over hoofs every time."

Saturday forenoon they made a good record, the mill sawing more than seven thousand feet of boards.

"What do you say to shutting down for the day and climbing Mount Nebo this afternoon?" proposed Budge. "We're ahead of our schedule and I think

we're entitled to a little vacation. The air's so clear that we'll get a corking view."

The plan met with everybody's approval. Throppy banked his fire carefully. The men who lived in the neighborhood went home. Even those who occupied the cabins around the mill scattered on various errands to Barham Four Corners and Parcherville. By two o'clock the boys were on their way through the pines to the foot of the mountain.

Soon they reached the lower slopes and began to ascend. Up they went, up, up, through the dim, green twilight of the quiet woods; over beds of soft gray moss; past spreading clumps of fern and rare clusters of waxy-white Indian-pipe; across ledges sparsely covered with blueberry and ground juniper; through patches of dwarf spruce and pine and oak, warped and twisted by the fierce winter winds; until after a final scramble over the rocks they came out on the bare ledgy summit.

There in the strong, cool breeze they threw themselves flat to regain their breath and drink in the view. East, west, north, and south the forest-clad country stretched away in a rumpled green carpet, broken by hill and field, lake and river, tiny white farmhouses and red barns, with here and there a white ribbon of dusty road. The sky was without a cloud. Far west on the blue horizon loomed the giant range of the White Mountains, topped by majestic Washington.

The boys gazed, spellbound. Even Percy, in high

spirits at being freed from his work, was awed to soberness by the magnificence of the scene.

"Great, isn't it?" he said.

"Yes," agreed Jim, "it's certainly hard to beat. If I stopped here long enough, I guess I'd come to be as fond of the country as Throppy is. Not that I'm going back on the salt water—but I like the woods, too."

Percy, foraging with a healthy appetite, soon discovered a patch of blueberries in a hollow of the rocks.

"Big as the end of my thumb and thick as mud! Come on, fellows!"

Soon each boy was outstretched beside his own special bush, picking, eating, and snatching occasional glimpses of the landscape.

"There's the Peavey lot!" exclaimed Throppy.

Far below in the clearing carved out of the surrounding pines they could see the yellow-roofed mill with its ebony stack.

"I've a new name for that place," said Jim.

"What is it?" asked Budge.

"Purgatory."

"I've sometimes been tempted to call it something stronger," remarked Lane.

"Well, whichever it is," responded Jim, "we're going to win through. I wonder what 'll hit us next."

He did not have to wonder long.

Percy sprang to his feet with a wild yell.

"There goes a porcupine!"

Quills, routed from his lair in an adjacent thicket,

panic stricken, waddled lurchingly down over the ledges, while the boys laughed and shouted at him.

Suddenly-whee-ee-ee!

The boys leaped to their feet. Beside the black chimney on the Peavey lot a tiny white cloud was puffing up. From the pines beyond the mill rose a spreading blur of grayish smoke. Budge was the first to appreciate its meaning.

"All down, fellows!" he shouted. "The lot's

afire!"

#### XVI

#### FIGHTING FIRE

DOWN the broken mountain-side rushed the boys, fear gripping their heartstrings; clattering over ledges, crashing through thickets, spurred on by the warning note of the incessant whistle. The catastrophe had fallen as suddenly and unexpectedly as a thunderbolt from a sky as clear and blue as that which arched above them. They had good reason to run; their whole summer was in jeopardy.

Budge was ahead, with Jim close behind him, while Percy and Throppy galloped in the rear. Lane's brain was in a turmoil; his face showed his feelings.

"What did I tell you?" he flung back to Jim.

At first they caught frequent glimpses of the increasing smoke cloud that rose from the mill clearing, but as they descended the trees concealed the mass of drifting gray.

On the lower slopes of the mountain the woods were more open and they made quicker and easier progress. The strong wind, soughing through the topmost boughs, brought with it a faint scent of burning pine. The persistent scream of the whistle, the voice of the plant crying for help, grew constantly

#### FIGHTING FIRE

louder. Somebody had evidently tied down the wire.

The uncertainty as to what was happening at the mill tormented Budge. Fanned by the wind, the flames might already have set the structure ablaze. Would the boys be in time to save it? Success or failure might hang on two or three minutes. They ran faster.

The Peavey lot at last! The boys burst into a choppers' clearing and rushed down a scoot road. A thick cloud of smoke rolled through the pines into their faces. A sharp crackling and snapping reached their ears.

"I'm afraid she's gone!" gasped Budge. "Hurry, fellows!"

A moment later they came in sight of the mill, whose whistle was still screeching deafeningly. The ground to windward was alive with leaping, tossing tongues. The slab-pile was burning. Already fiery serpents were writhing up the posts that supported the board roof. To the boys the sight was an appalling one; all their high hopes seemed to be going up in smoke and flame.

Close to the sawdust heap in the very path of the approaching conflagration a hatless, coatless figure, gray-haired, with red, perspiring face, was furiously wielding a shovel in the fruitless attempt to beat out the fast spreading fire. The boys at once recognized Merrithew. Unquestionably it was he who had given the alarm by tying down the whistle wire.

But, though he leaped from spot to spot and swung his shovel with the agility of youth, the flames steadily gained. He could be in but a single place at once while the blaze was advancing on a broad front.

An intense relief overspread his features as he glanced round and saw the boys. He waved his

arm in a wild gesture for help.

"Take hold here quick, if you want to save your mill!"

No words of Merrithew's were needed to urge the four to do their utmost. In such a crisis the mantle of leadership naturally fell upon Jim, and he did not shirk the responsibility. He snatched up the spare shovel leaning against the boiler.

"Budge, run over to Ireson's cabin and get his spade! Percy, you and Throppy take those pails, fill them out of the barrels, and throw the water where

I tell you! Lively now! Seconds count!"

Leaving the others to follow his directions, he darted round the end of the plant to reinforce the hermit in his gallant but lonely battle. They were soon joined by Budge with Ireson's spade. The three fought their hardest to keep the fire out of the mill, while Percy and Throppy dashed pailful after pailful of water on the blazing posts, striving to prevent the flames from catching the roof.

Still the conflagration gained. Budge turned a white, hopeless face toward Jim.

"It's no use! She's gone!"

"Not yet! Don't give up!"

#### FIGHTING FIRE

Spurling was fighting like a demon. In his powerful grasp the heavy shovel rose and fell as if it weighed no more than a straw. His flushed face, blackened by smoke and cinders, was mottled with drops of perspiration. Percy, catching a glimpse of his chum's set features, was reminded of the losing battle they had waged with wind and sea when their dory had been blown off Tarpaulin the summer before. How different from their present situation! Yet here too Jim was putting forth all there was in him.

A shout from Throppy!

"The barrels are almost empty! What 'll we do?"
And the posts were still burning. Something almost like a groan burst from Jim's lips. Even he was beginning to despair.

"Take a couple of pails apiece, run down to the

lake, and fill 'em! Be as quick as you can!"

It was a forelorn hope; for the lake was hundreds of feet distant. Budge had a sudden inspiration.

"Wait!" he cried. "Can't we use the hose?"

"Don't think there's enough steam in the boiler," returned Jim. "To do any good, we ought to have about seventy-five pounds. And there's nowhere near so much. But you might try it. Shut off that whistle!"

He swung his shovel more fiercely than ever. Throppy and Percy cast aside their pails and sprang to the boiler. They unfastened the whistle wire and the screeching suddenly ceased. Unscrewing the short pipe from the injector, they put on the fifty-foot

16 2

hose. Percy dragged it through the mill, uncoiling it, as he went. He aimed the nozzle at one of the blazing posts.

"We'll soon kill that!"

But no water came. Jim had been right. The well-banked fire had not been hot enough to keep up the requisite number of pounds of steam, and the constant whistling had sapped the strength of what was already in the boiler. Bitterly disappointed, Percy sprang back with the hose.

"Come on with your pails, Throppy!"

The two raced down through the pines to the lake. The other boys and Merrithew still waged their losing fight. But at last even Jim acknowledged that the flames could no longer be kept out of the mill. He had brains as well as grit, and his good sense told him that it was foolish to waste any further strength trying to stave off the inevitable. The only sensible thing to do was to make the best of the situation and change their tactics.

"The fire's got the best of us!" he cried. "We can't stop it from running through the mill. Let's

hold it down all we can!"

Throppy and Percy came hurrying back from the lake, in each hand a slopping pail of water, two-thirds full.

"Where'll you have this?" shouted Whittington.

"Nowhere now. Put it down. We may need it worse later. Catch hold, everybody, and let's get out whatever we can move! Hustle! In a couple of

#### FIGHTING FIRE

minutes it 'll be so hot under that roof that a man won't be able to live there!"

Jim's orders were obeyed to the letter. In and out of the mill darted the boys, salvaging everything that they could lift. Merrithew, forgetful of his years, was as active as any of them. Doggett suddenly appeared and united his efforts to those of the others. Meanwhile the fire, unhindered, ran up the posts and swept over and under the board roof. A furnacelike heat smote down upon the workers. Flames caught here and there on the loose flooring.

Soon nothing that could be promptly moved remained within the structure. Doggett, without waiting for instructions, had been cutting the belts squarely across and saving as many as he could.

"Now the carriage, Budge!" cried Jim.

Together the two boys leaped in under the ceiling of simmering flame. In an incredibly short time the heavy carriage, impelled by their strong hands, was sliding along its track toward the tail end of the mill. A moment later a vigorous push sent it out of the burning structure, and off the rails into the sawdust heap. Budge and Jim gladly sprang after it; the scorching heat had become almost unendurable.

Doggett gave a yell of dismay.

"My tally-boards!"

In the general excitement the perforated sections that bore the record of their summer's work had been forgotten. The interior of the mill was now ablaze in a dozen places.

"It's too late to save 'em!" shouted Jim. "Let

'em go! Here! Stop!"

But his warning was unheeded. The marker, determined at any cost to save his pegged account-books, flung himself into the midst of the flames. A few quick leaps carried him to his accustomed place. The fire was already licking the thin boards when he wrenched them down and rushed out again into the open air, singed but triumphant.

Jim's brain, keyed to its highest pitch, caught another idea. They could not prevent the engine and other machinery from suffering some damage, but the harm could be materially lessened by prompt action. He ran at the top of his speed to their cabin,

and was quickly back with a coil of rope.

"We'll throw this round one of the rafters and pull the roof off to one side," he explained. "That 'll keep it from doing so much damage when it falls. There's the place!"

He fastened the rope end loosely round a timber

which the flames had not yet reached.

"Now then! Grab hold and pull for all there is in you! We've got to rip it off before this rope

catches fire and burns through."

Forming a line, they all began pulling. The rope strained, the rafter creaked; but the structure had been strongly built and the roof stood firm. A serpent of fire crept toward the knot.

"Once more!" exhorted Jim. "All together!" The six gave a mighty surge. This time they were

#### FIGHTING FIRE

successful. The blazing framework swayed toward them. Crack-ck!! Crack-ck!! Crash-sh!!! Down it tumbled with a splintering smash, sending a column of sparks and dust high into the air. Despite the havoc the conflagration was working in the rest of the mill, the boys could not restrain a cheer, for the falling boards had almost cleared the engine. They stood still for a moment to regain their breath.

"Well, there's one thing, at any rate, to be thankful

for," observed Spurling, quietly.

But plenty still remained to be done. The ruined roof was burning briskly where it had dropped, while the posts that had supported it stood up stiffly, wrapped in flames. The fire was creeping along the ground around the ends of the mill. It had already caught in a dozen places in the woods to leeward, but the trampled earth beside the boiler and the scoot road leading to the brow formed an island of safety, on which was piled the material rescued from the plant.

"Take two of those pails of water to the sawdust heap, Percy," ordered Jim. "Fight the fire away from the carriage. Throppy, keep an eye on this other stuff and see that it doesn't catch from any

spark. Pity we haven't more water!"

He leaned upon his shovel handle, his eyes on the

fiercely blazing ruins.

"Why can't we use dirt?" exclaimed Budge. "I've heard Ote say that there was nothing better for putting out a fire on the ground."

Doggett seconded Budge's suggestion.

"It's just the thing here! The quicker we stop those boards from burning, the less it 'll cost to repair

the damage. Where's that pick-ax?"

A wide hole was soon opened in the surface of the ground. Striking his pick again and again into the dry soil, Doggett kept it so loose that it could easily be taken away with pail and shovel. Jim's first test of this simple fire extinguisher convinced him of its value.

"It's just a question of throwing as much of it on as we can!" he cried. "Keep at it, boys! We're not beaten yet."

The woods were now blazing beyond them in the

direction of the lake.

"What can we do about that?" asked Budge, nodding toward the roaring furnace among the pines.

"Nothing now," returned Doggett. "It'll have to burn itself out. The lake 'll stop it; and this wind is driving it so straight that it won't spread very far to either side before we can get a chance to tackle it.

We'd better put all we've got on the mill."

The pick rose and fell; the dirt flew. Foot by foot the boys fought their way over the smoking, blazing ruins. Eyes smarted, faces and hands were blistered, holes were burned in clothing, and feet were scorched; but for almost two hours the pails and shovels were busy. At the end of that time only a few straggling wisps of smoke rose from the site of the plant.

### FIGHTING FIRE

Jim glanced at Doggett. The marker dropped his pick.

"No use throwing on any more," he said. "We've done all we can."

Gladly, yet heartsick at the sight before them, the fire fighters rested. Between them and the lake hung a grayish haze, set with blackened trunks. Beyond and on either side of this swath of ruin the fire still blazed and crackled. Fortunately the cabins, situated to one side of the mill, had escaped destruction. For the first time the boys became aware that some of the townspeople were standing in the edge of the clearing and watching them silently.

Doggett rose from the ground, on which he had

thrown himself, exhausted.

"Might as well start in again now," he observed. "Here comes help!"

Ireson, Parsons, Maliber, and Benoit burst into the clearing, breathless and excited. Evidently they had run a long distance. At the sight of the ruins they gave vent to exclamations of regret.

"What could have started it?" queried Parsons. "There wasn't a whiff coming out of the stack when

we left this noon."

Doggett shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm not so much interested in knowing what started it as I am in putting it out," he replied. "Go up to Josh Kimball's and get his horse and plow. His family's away for the afternoon, but borrowing's all right in a case like this. We'll

draw furrows where the pines are open enough, to stop the fire from running along the ground. 'Twon't do for it to spread any further."

Budge, Jim, and the rest of the crew threw themselves zealously into the task of checking the conflagration and some of the spectators rendered them grudging assistance; but it was far into the night before the flames were completely under control.

At five that afternoon Legore and Grannitt, returning in an open wagon from a farm auction in the neighboring town of Stowe, reached the top of a hill that afforded them a wide view of Barham. A cloud of smoke overhanging the woods near Lake Agawam caught the lawyer's attention.

"Hulloo!" he exclaimed. "There's a fire!"

Legore looked, but manifested no surprise.

"Yes," he remarked. "It's on the Peavey lot." The certainty of his tone startled Grannitt; he gave his companion a sharp glance.

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"How do you know?"

The lumberman did not turn a hair.

"I've got good eyes," he responded, coolly. "What d'you think o' that pair o' steers I bought at the auction?"

No further comments upon the conflagration passed between them; but Grannitt's cigar wabbled unsteadily in his mouth and his hands trembled. Legore, noting these signs of mental unrest, grinned contemptuously and spat over the wheel.

#### XVII

#### DOWN BUT NOT OUT

DAYLIGHT was not far distant when the fire fighters on the Peavey lot felt it safe to relax their efforts. Engrossed in the battle that had kept their nerves on edge for hours, their eyes dulled by smoke and dazzled by constant staring at the many-colored flames, they had not noticed that the stars had grown dimmer and dimmer and had at last been completely hidden by thick black clouds. The strong wind of the previous afternoon had blown up a storm.

Doggett was the first to observe the change in the weather. As he looked up, a drop of water struck him in the face, working an instant and marvelous change in his reserved, saturnine disposition.

"Hurrah, boys!" he yelled, capering and swinging

his arms. "Rain! Rain! Rain!"

Cries of joy answered him. Throppy had almost reached the limit of his newly regained strength, and Percy was not much better off. Even Budge and Jim, who had drawn freely on their reserves of energy and endurance in the long battle, had no great surplus left. Jim opened his heart to Ireson, who was near him.

"I've been on the water a good many times when I'd have given almost anything for pleasant weather; but I've never been a tenth as glad to have it clear up as I am now to see it rain."

The infrequent drops became more frequent; they grew to a steady patter, which soon developed into a brisk shower; and this ere long increased to a drenching downpour. Doggett called his hosts together.

"It's all over but the shouting, boys," he wheezed, hoarsely. "And I've swallowed so much smoke that I don't feel as if I could make any more noise than a grasshopper. So we'll cut out the celebration and get back to camp."

"Want to set sentinels?" asked Budge.

"Sentinels? What for? In ten minutes it 'll be coming down hard enough to drown out a bonfire of pitch-pine knots. Let's make for our cabins as fast as we can, and be thankful we've got good, dry bunks to crawl into."

No further urging was necessary. Heads bowed, knees shaking, bodies limp from weariness, the boys stumbled back to their little settlement near the clearing. The distance was only a few score yards, but it seemed miles to their leaden feet and aching joints. Finally they staggered up to their cabin, pushed open the door, and fell inside.

Momentarily forgetful of the source whence their electricity was derived, Jim tried to snap on the light; but the bulb did not yield the faintest glimmer.

#### DOWN BUT NOT OUT

The steam whose power would have illumined the cabin had been whistled away the afternoon before, and the unsheltered, rain-beaten boiler in the blackness outside was rapidly cooling off. Jim fumbled along the shelf until he found and lighted the lamp.

"Let's wash up and turn in," said he.

Utterly weary in body and mind, the four, one after another, bathed their blackened hands and faces and threw themselves upon their bunks, too much exhausted to take the trouble of undressing.

The forenoon was well advanced before they woke, almost as stiff and weary as before their few hours of fitful, unsatisfying slumber. A heavy rain was falling steadily from the low, gray clouds, and the whole atmosphere, both physical and mental, was somber

and depressing.

Jim, the first one up, started to prepare a light breakfast. The others watched him languidly without proffering assistance. Even Percy was in the dumps. Budge was crushed and disheartened; there were dark rings round his eyes and his face wore a listless expression. To him the disaster evidently spelled the ruin of their summer's hopes.

The meal of bacon, corn bread, and coffee was soon

disposed of. Nobody had any appetite.

"Now," proposed Jim, with an effort at liveliness,

"let's go out and take account of stock."

"What's the use?" said Budge. "I can see all I want to from the window. It was Pike's Peak or bust; and we've busted."

"Not quite so bad as that, I guess," returned his mate. "We've a few things left that haven't gone up in smoke. It's up to us to collect the pieces and glue 'em together again."

"I'm afraid it can't be done," replied Budge.

But he put on his mackintosh and went out with the others.

The prospect could not well have been more dismal. A constant drizzle was seeping down through the dripping pine boughs. Only the stack, the boiler, and the engine, and the stumps of a half dozen posts rose stark and black above the ruins marking the site of the mill, which still smoked sullenly. The smell of burnt wood permeated the damp air. The ground beside the boiler was a trampled slough of sticky mud. Instead of the tall, green forest that had extended down to Lake Agawam was an open stretch, rough with knolls, and bristling with charred trunks.

Few words were spoken as the boys surveyed this scene of desolation. It was a despondent, discouraged group that returned to their cabin. Everybody's spirits were at the lowest ebb; they avoided one another's eyes. Even Jim was blue and sober.

Budge broke the oppressive silence.

"Might as well face the music and have it over with! Guess 'twon't take very long. It looks to me as if the thing was already settled for us."

"I'm not putting my hands up yet," said Jim.
"The matter may not be so bad as it seems. Let's

### DOWN BUT NOT OUT

call 'Gene in! We'll want all the advice we can get before we come to a conclusion."

"Call him if you want to," consented his chum. "But it won't do any good. All the advice in the world can't pull us out of this scrape and put us on our feet again. What's the use of beating round the bush! We're through, and we all know it."

Jim's jaw set doggedly.

"I've wrestled enough," he returned, "to know that a man isn't beaten till both his shoulders are down on the mat. You remember that I wasn't over and above anxious to take hold of this proposition; but, now that I'm in it, I intend to stick till the last gun's fired. Call 'Gene, will you, Perce?"

Percy stepped out into the rain, and soon came back with the marker. Doggett appeared but little

more cheerful than the boys.

"'Gene," began Jim, "we're holding a council to decide what we'd better do, and we'll be glad of any advice you can give us. In the first place we want to canvass the whole affair from the bottom up and see just where we stand. How do you think this blaze started?"

A frown creased Doggett's brow. He hesitated

before speaking.

"I don't see how it possibly could have caught from the mill. The fire was banked in good shape after we shut down yesterday noon; I took particular notice of that. So no sparks could have come out of the stack."

"That's what I think," said Jim. "When we started for the mountain everything about here was absolutely safe. Besides, Mr. Merrithew told me that when he got to the plant, after he first smelled smoke, the flames were in the brush to windward. That shows it was no carelessness on our part. Somebody else is to blame."

"That's sure," agreed Doggett. "I've known fires in the woods to catch from burning gun wads and from matches men have thrown down after lighting

their pipes."

"There were no gunners about here yesterday," observed Jim. "If there had been we'd have heard 'em. It simmers down to the man with the match. And the question is who he could have been, and whether or not he dropped it on purpose."

He cast a glance about the group. What he saw on their faces told him that it was unnecessary to proceed further along that line. Everybody's thoughts had turned to the same man—McAuliffe!

"Well, whoever did it, or why," continued Spurling, "the mischief's done. It's easy to see now that we oughtn't to have gone off without leaving a guard. Next time we'd know better. We've one thing to be thankful for—the fire has been confined to the Peavey lot. We'll be the only losers."

Budge's melancholy face showed that this thought afforded him small consolation. Jim looked at the marker.

"'Gene, you've had to do with portable mills since

### DOWN BUT NOT OUT

you were a boy. Tell us how much we can salvage from this wreck and what it 'll cost to put the plant back into shape."

Doggett's brow was corrugated with thought. A

minute of silence elapsed ere he spoke slowly.

"The stack and the boiler aren't hurt at all. The engine's damaged some, but not very bad. The saw's spoiled. We'll have to replace the roof and most of the other woodwork, and there'll be need of a good deal of re-babbitting. But we've saved most of our belts and other movable stuff. Five hundred dollars ought to put us back in good running order."

Jim's countenance lighted up.

"That's a good deal less than I thought it 'd be. Cheer up, boys! We'll weather this gale, after all."

But Doggett's statement dispelled little of the

gloom on Budge's face.

"Five hundred dollars is a small part of what it 'd really cost us. It 'd be at least a month before we could be sawing again, and by that time the heart 'd be gone out of the summer. We'd be over a quarter of a million feet behind the amount I figured on. It hurts me to say it, and I hate to give up beat; but I'm afraid we're through."

A stillness settled over the group in the cabin. Budge's words seemed to pronounce the doom of the undertaking that had been launched with such

bright hopes.

Then Jim stood up. He looked out through the

window over the blackened clearing at the ruined mill,

stretched out his arms, and laughed.

"Boys," said he, "what's the use of lying down? If we should give up now, we'd be in worse shape than we were before we started. We shouldn't break even; we'd be hundreds of dollars in the hole. Things look bad. They can't be any worse, so they're bound to improve; they can't help it. We've struck bottom and from now on we're going the other way; it's only a question of how fast. If we weather this we can weather anything; and we can do it. There's something in us bigger than any fire. No setback's ever quite so bad as it seems to be at first. All we need to put us back on our feet is to keep on doing one little thing after another. There's only one fatal mistake a man can make, and that is to lie down and quit. If we give up now, like whipped dogs, we're beaten, and Legore and Grannitt 'll have the laugh on us; and I've just enough ugliness in me not to give them that satisfaction. I don't believe in taking a knock-down for a knock-out. I believe in fighting clean through to the end, bitter or sweet. We've got to decide whether to pull up or to pull out, to stick or not to stick. I say stick!"

He ceased. The boys exchanged glances. Jim's exhortation had been like a trumpet blast, rousing each one to do the best that was in him. Even Budge's gloomy face had lighted up at his mate's stirring speech. But the matter was too serious to be decided under the spur of any momentary enthusiasm.

### DOWN BUT NOT OUT

"Fellows," said Budge, after an interval of silence, "every one of us knows what the situation is. There's no use in talking it over any more. We've got to make our minds up right away either to repair the mill and stay here till the end of the summer, or to clean up and get out. I propose that we think the matter over, each one by himself, and that we then take a secret ballot. What do you say?"

The others assented. For five minutes nobody spoke. At the end of that period Budge passed

around blank slips for the vote.

"'Yes' means that we stay; 'no,' that we go. You're the ballot clerk, 'Gene!"

Soberly, realizing all that was at stake, the boys recorded their choice, folded the slips, and passed them to Doggett. The vote was unanimously for sticking. Jim's grit had carried the day.

The great question once decided, the tension eased up. Doggett registered his hearty approval of their decision.

"I'm mighty glad you've decided to hold on, boys. I feel sure we can get this plant back into shape in time to turn out a good summer's work. You won't make quite so much money as you would have made if there hadn't been any fire, but you'll a good deal more than come out whole. This blaze has eaten up all the loose stuff round the mill, so that nobody can burn you out again. Besides, I'd have hated to see you knuckle under to that pair of crooks."

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"How long will it be before we can start sawing?"

asked Budge.

"Two weeks, if we don't waste any time, and everybody is willing to work his hardest. We ought to get running as soon as we can, for the logs will stain, this hot weather. But it'll mean longer days than we've been making."

"What's nine hours?" said Jim. "I'll be glad to put in half as many more for the sake of getting back on our feet. I haven't really begun to work yet."

The others voiced a spirit equally determined. Outside, it was raining as hard as ever, but the decision they had reached seemed to brighten the somber atmosphere under the pines. Even the ruined mill and the swart desolation stretching toward the lake took on a more hopeful aspect.

Legore was right in saying that nothing happened on the Peavey lot without his knowledge. That very afternoon he was made acquainted with the boys' decision to rebuild, and that evening in Grannitt's office he expressed his opinion of their foolishness in language more vigorous than choice.

"Them fellers haven't brains enough to know when

tney're beat," he declared, indignantly.

The lawyer sank his voice almost to a whisper.

"Your trumps don't seem to work much better than mine, Ches," he remarked.

"You wait," said Legore.

#### XVIII

#### JIM BESTS LEGORE

NCE the boys had reached a definite decision to stand by their guns, their prospects did not appear half so gloomy. Jim's spirits proved contagious, and they turned to the task of planning for the future with an ardor that even the beating rain and the charred wreck beyond the boiler could not damp.

"We'll soon have that old stack smoking again!"

exclaimed Doggett.

"I'll run up to Kimball's and call father on the long-distance 'phone," said Budge. "He ought to know about this right away."

As he stepped out into the downpour he actually broke into a whistle. His friends glanced at one another and smiled.

"He's got over the blues and he's coming back strong," observed Jim. "From now on there won't be one of us who'll work any harder or put more ginger into his job. All he needed was something to start him."

It was useless to attempt to do much outside until the rain stopped; but during the remainder of the day

the boys were by no means idle. Aided by Doggett, they made a list, down to the last nail, of everything that would be needed to put the plant back into first-class shape. Letters were written and posted; new parts were engaged at the hardware store at Parcherville; and a rush order for another saw was telegraphed to the manufacturers.

By night the clouds had rained themselves out and

there was a fiery-red sunset.

"That promises a fair day to-morrow," prophesied the marker. "We'll need it and a good many more. From now to the end of the season, every hour this plant is idle means a dead loss of just so many dollars."

They turned in early and slept like the dead. When they woke at a late hour the next morning, the blackened clearing was flooded with sunlight; the sky was blue; and the birds were singing as if a forest fire were an unheard of thing.

Under the direction of Doggett the entire force began clearing away the ruins. It was a smutty, disagreeable job; but fifteen pairs of hands made quick, if not very light, work. By noon the foundation of the mill was tolerably free from debris, and pails and shovels were busily engaged in removing the dirt that had checked the fire. Graff and Ireson were particularly active.

An auto honked. Down the wood road came a car with five men, among them Mr. Lane, and, to the great surprise and joy of the boys, Otis Briggs.

# JIM BESTS LEGORE

"Straight from home," said Budge's father. "Started early this morning, and got here as quick as the muddy roads would let us. Well, you are in a mess, sure enough!"

He surveyed the bare foundation, the shelterless machinery, and the pile of half-burned boards beside

the boiler.

"Still, you've made good headway clearing up. I'm glad you've decided to keep on. If you stopped, Legore'd have a chance to crow over you, and me, too; and I shouldn't like that. Guess you'd better let me and the other owners help make your loss

good. We'll be perfectly willing."

"No," declined his son. "We're much obliged; but we've talked it over and have decided to shoulder everything ourselves. We can do it. Of course we'll be obliged for any advice you can give us, and we'll be more than pleased to have you take hold and help put the mill back into shape; but we're going to pay for every stroke of work you do. That's flat!"

"Just as you feel about it! I like your grit. Some fellows would have given up after such a setback."

A faint red stole into Budge's cheeks.

"You can give Jim, here, the credit. I'll have to be honest and say I was pretty near ready to throw up the sponge; but he wouldn't listen to it."

"Well, that's the spirit that wins," approved his

father.

The boys and Doggett gave Briggs a warm greeting.

"I'm fit as a fiddle," declared the sawyer. "But I expect Jim is handling the levers so well that you

won't want me any more."

"Jim has been doing fine," said Budge, "and I don't know how we'd have run the business if you hadn't taught him to saw; but we can use you, and another man like you, if we could only get him. After this mill is started again we'll have to make long hours, to catch up with our schedule. Don't you worry about throwing Jim out of a job! I'll guarantee his muscles won't grow flabby for want of exercise."

For the next few days the clearing was a lively place. Thanks to careful planning and abundant labor, everything went like clockwork. Plenty of lumber of all sorts was at hand, and the hardware company's truck brought other necessary things from Parcherville on short notice. The new saw arrived on schedule time. In less than two weeks the mill stood complete again, fully as good as before, if indeed not better.

On the evening after the work was finished, Mr. Lane sat with the boys in their cabin. Throppy had filled the firebox of the boiler, and all was ready for steaming up the next morning.

"This fire and the shut-downs we've had before have set us back over a hundred and fifty thousand feet," said Budge. "No matter how fast we work, we can't hope to make that up before the end of the season; but we'll put in all the extra time we can.

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You can bank on one thing—this mill will never be

left alone again."

"What hits us a little hard," he continued, "is the burning of that patch between here and the lake. It had some of the biggest pines on the whole lot, and they were within easy hauling distance. We can save a good many of 'em by sawing 'em at once; but the most are burned so bad that they won't make lumber. I'd counted on holding 'em till the last, but the fire's got ahead of me."

"That reminds me!" exclaimed Throppy. "Mr. Merrithew told me this afternoon that he had a proposition to make, whenever you were ready to

listen to it."

"I'll be glad to hear it now, if he cares to come over," said Budge.

Throppy went out, and soon returned with the hermit.

"I understand you have something you would like to say to us, Mr. Merrithew," remarked the younger Lane.

"Yes. I know this fire has robbed you of some of your best timber. How would you like to cut a couple of hundred thousand on my northeast corner?"

Budge gasped.

"Why, that's the cream of your lot! I don't believe there's a finer patch of pine in the whole state."

"If there is, I don't know where. It's the first

time in my life I ever broke my word. I said that none of these trees should be cut while I was alive, but I'm going to give you boys a chance at 'em. I like your spirit and I haven't forgotten what you did for me a few weeks ago. Besides, this fire has opened my eyes. I'd rather those pines should be cut than have them rot or be burned."

Merrithew's proposal, so utterly unexpected, almost took the boys' breath away. All were deeply touched by the hermit's kindness, for they realized the affection he felt for his trees. Budge was at a loss for a proper reply. The recluse misunderstood his hesitation.

"Perhaps you don't want 'em," and there was actually a touch of disappointment in his voice.

Budge hastened to reassure him.

"Want 'em? Of course we do! We're only too glad of the chance; and I don't know how we can ever thank you. We'll pay whatever stumpage seems right to you."

"You can have 'em on the same terms you've made with your father and the others. So that's all settled. Now I've a piece of news you won't like. We're going to have an uncomfortable neighbor. Zack Brewster has sold the lot south of this to Chesley Legore!"

The boys were both surprised and disgusted at the unwelcome tidings.

"How long ago?" asked Budge.

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"Only yesterday. The two of them were running out the bounds in the forenoon."

Budge made a grimace.

"Well, I don't see any help for it. What can't be cured must be endured. It's a case of our keeping on our own side of the line and he keeping on his. I don't believe he can hurt us any worse than he has already."

The mill started again the next morning. Jim insisted that Briggs resume his former position, and, though the sawyer demurred, he could not help showing his pleasure at once more grasping the familiar levers. Jim took an ax and started up one of the scoot roads.

"I can find enough to do on the lot to keep me out of mischief the next few weeks. First, I'm going to have Joe teach me to chop and to pull one handle of a cross-cut saw."

Only waiting to see the first log turned into boards, Mr. Lane and his three men started for the Four Corners, where they planned to take the stage for the railroad station at Edginton. Percy drove them over to Holway & Benner's, and returned to the mill in the car, which it had been decided should be left for the boys to use.

That first day they ran the plant until six o'clock, and sawed thirteen thousand. Jim put his strength and skill where they would do the most good, lending a hand first in one place, then in another. He chopped, he sawed, he helped load and unload

scoots, he handled logs on the brow and boards in the pit, and did all sorts of odd jobs.

On the second morning Budge suggested that he go along the southern edge of the lot to see if Brewster

and Legore had run their line correctly.

"I don't trust 'em," said Lane. "Legore 'll gouge us all he can, and Brewster 'll back him. Better take that plan father brought and see if it corresponds with their bounds. I'll bet my hat you'll find a big difference."

Ten minutes brought Jim to the southern edge of the Peavey lot. A succession of ax-cuts, freshly blazed on the pines, spoke eloquently of the recent survey. Opening his map, he began to compare it with the new line. A very slight examination was sufficient to convince him that the latter was glaringly incorrect.

"Just what you might expect," thought he. "Legore's at least two rods over on us."

A footstep on the needles. Jim raised his head and saw Hard Cash himself!

Engrossed in his examination of the line, the boy had not been conscious of the lumberman's stealthy approach. The latter's features wore a look of malevolent triumph; evidently he felt that the moment he had been anticipating had arrived. As he noted the plan that Jim had been consulting he scowled ferociously.

"What 're you spyin' round here for?" he growled. "Lookin' for trouble, hey? Well, you won't hev to

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look very hard or very long. What 're you doin' on my land, anyway? Get off'n it as quick as y'r feet 'll take ye!'

Jim laid down the map and straightened up. It did not require much of a prophet to foretell what was coming. Legore's aggressive, insulting manner was easy to interpret—he felt that he had his enemy in his power and he proposed to wreak vengeance upon him. Spurling realized that the only thing that lay between him and a brutal thrashing was the power within himself. His muscles hardened and he became alert and watchful. Outwardly, however, his bearing was unchanged, and there was no tremor in his voice as he replied.

"When you say I'm on your land, I think you're mistaken, Mr. Legore," he answered, evenly. "According to this map your line is too far north by more than thirty feet; so we're both standing on the Peavey lot."

Hard Cash let himself go. The blood flooded through his arteries till his face assumed a purplish tinge; his eyes strained from their sockets; his voice rose to a bellow.

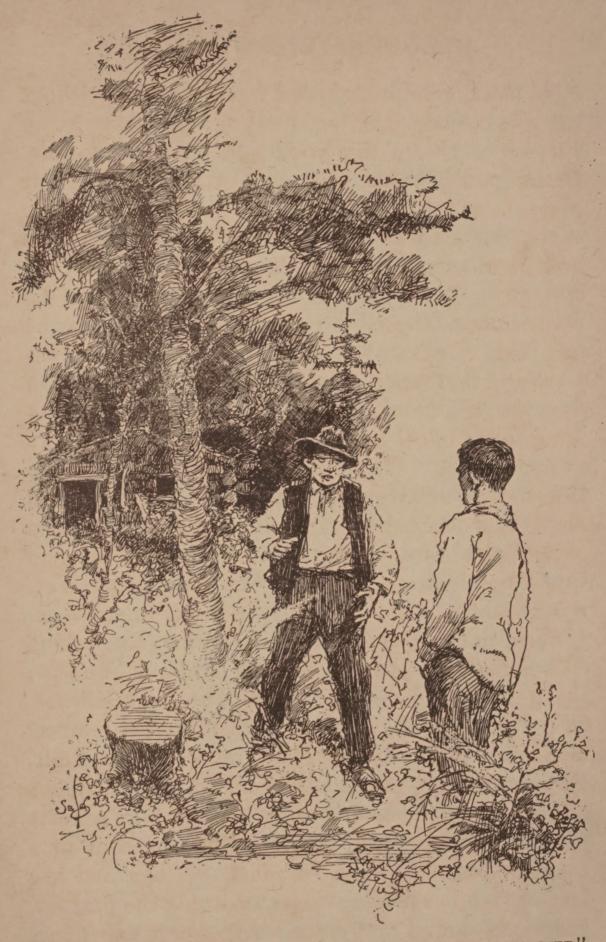
"Don't you dare to sass me, you young sprout!" he roared. "Remember what I said about gettin' square with ye some day? Wal, the time has come. I always figger on payin' up my debts in full with interest, an' you've got more than six per cent comin' to ye. No half-baked college feller can make the talk to me that you made an' get away with it!

Now I've got ye just where I want ye, alone without the rest o' your gang, an' I'm goin' to lick ye good. I'll give ye a hidin' that you'll remember all your life. Better pull off that sweater if you don't want it

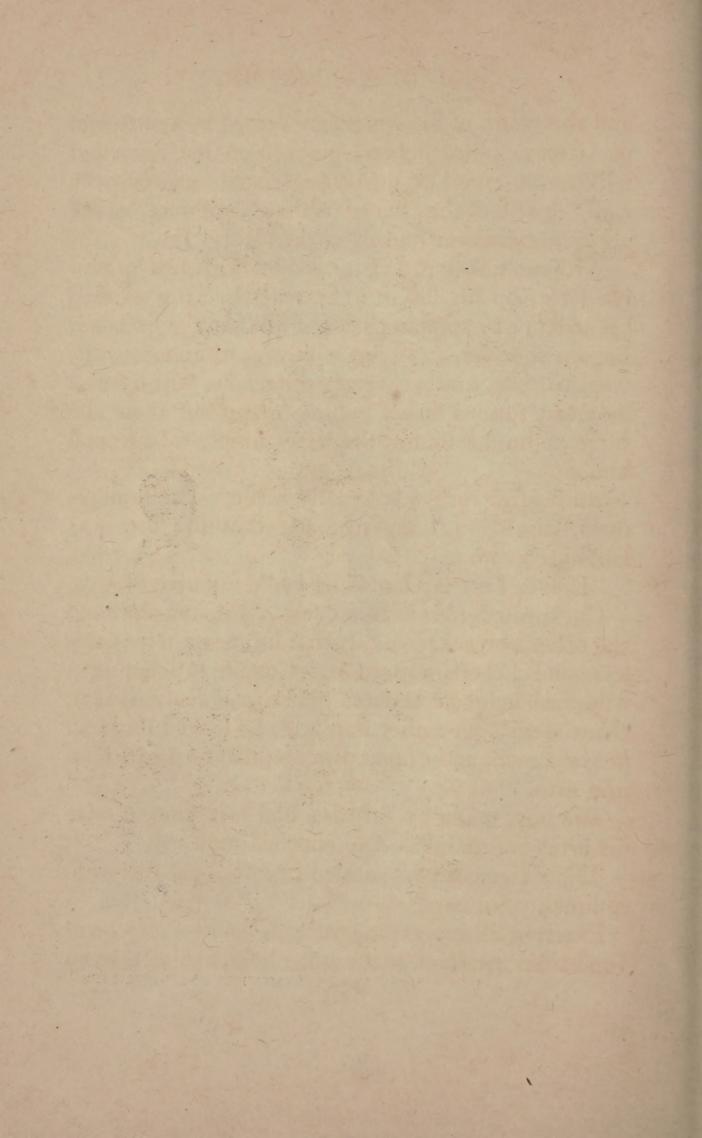
mussed up!"

He took a threatening step forward. Jim's arms grew rigid as iron bars and he set his feet firmly, yet springily. Words, he knew, were useless; so he wasted none. Legore intended to do precisely as he had said. Jim saw but one way of averting the conflict, and that was by flight. Younger and fleeter of foot, he could easily have outstripped his bulky antagonist; but it was not in him to purchase safety at such a price. He did not underrate his adversary. Legore was unscrupulous and physically powerful; anger had doubled his strength, and he would stop at nothing to win. If Jim were beaten the older man would not hesitate to pound him to a pulp. Yet, though knowing this, the boy held his ground.

For a moment the two stood face to face, taking each other's measure. Only the shriek of the saw, rising shrilly and then dying away, broke the silence. Of the pair Jim was somewhat taller, but the lumberman was much heavier and more solidly built. Despite the fact that some of his bulk was fat, his combined weight and strength made him a most formidable antagonist, particularly dangerous in a rough-and-tumble fight. Though his age and the lack of vigorous physical exercise during the past few years had slowed him down a trifle, past experience



"I'LL GIVE YE A HIDIN' THAT YOU'LL REMEMBER ALL YOUR LIFE"



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and the youth of his opponent seemed to assure him of victory. Jim, lighter, quicker on his feet, and without an ounce of superfluous fat, brought to the fray the skill of the trained athlete, reinforced by the consciousness that he was in the right.

Without warning, Legore suddenly rushed in and tried to grip his foe in a bear's hug. Jim evaded his attempt by stepping aside at just the right second. Legore shot by, grasping wildly at the empty air, tried to turn, and went sprawling. He was up in a moment, furious at his failure. Whirling about, he came at Jim again, but the latter simply sidestepped him.

Rush after rush was equally futile. The lumberman foamed with rage; he felt that the boy was laughing at him.

"If ever I git my hands on ye," he muttered.
Unexpectedly his chance came. Jim had shunned the other's attacks so easily that he grew a trifle careless, and Legore noticed it. Cunningly feigning a wild onslaught, he arrested himself suddenly, sprang sidewise with an agility hardly to be looked for in so heavy a man, and caught Jim around the waist in an iron grip.

The boy, taken by surprise, had just time to raise

his arms before his enemy clinched him.

"Now I've got ye," snarled Legore, "an' I'm goin'

to break ye in two!"

Exerting all his great strength, he strove to bend Iim backward. Hehad the under hold, a thing that an

inexperienced wrestler would consider an advantage; and such it would prove unless immediately counteracted. Five seconds wasted by the lad would decide the battle against him. But his training in the college gymnasium had made him a skilled wrestler, and his brain and muscles had been so coordinated that they acted together. The instant he felt the grip around him tighten he made use of the strangle hold. Pressing his left hand into the small of Legore's back and thrusting his right forearm directly across the latter's windpipe, he pulled with his left and pushed with his right. Even the doughty lumberman could not withstand the sudden strain. He went over backward and Jim fell on top of him.

For two or three minutes a mighty struggle, noiseless save for Legore's labored breathing, took place under the pines. Mad with rage at his defeat, the lumberman heaved and tossed, trying to throw off his foe; but Jim held his advantage, sticking like a leech. On a sudden Legore ceased his unavailing efforts.

"I've had enough," he said quietly. "Let me up!"

Unsuspicious of treachery, Jim relaxed his hold and rose to his feet. His antagonist stood up and stretched himself. Then, without giving the slightest sign of his intention, he leaped like a panther on the amazed boy.

The attack caught Jim completely off his guard, and for an instant it seemed likely to accomplish its

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purpose. The lumberman's outstretched arms were closing round his enemy when the latter, recovering from his tremendous surprise, sprang back, barely eluding the clutching fingers. Legore's cry of baffled wrath changed to an enraged bellow as Jim's hard fist, swung like lightning, caught him squarely under the right eye.

Spurling's temper was now thoroughly aroused; he had never been so angry in his life. The treacherous trick which had so nearly won the victory for his foe had raised the lad's passions to white heat. Only his anger, instead of causing him to lose his head, as was the case with Legore, rendered him calmer and doubly dangerous.

It was a fight to a finish, and the quicker that finish could come the better.

Again Legore leaped like a wild animal. This time Jim awaited his onset. He had learned at college some of the principles of jiu-jutsu, or Japanese wrestling, and had familiarized himself with certain of its holds and throws. He would never have dreamed of employing these against an ordinary antagonist; but Legore's dirty trick prevented the lad from feeling any scruples about using all his skill to win. He stood alert, his nerves steady, his muscles like iron.

The lumberman's frantically swinging arms clutched at their prey. Out darted Jim's hands; each reached and gripped its mark. He turned quickly and arched his body. There was a volley of oaths,

a muffled yell of surprise and anger from Legore. His feet were twitched from the ground and his heavy bulk was flung through the air over Jim's shoulders. His head crashed against a pine and he dropped sprawling in a loose, insensible heap on the mounded needles!

#### XIX

#### HANDS UP

HARDLY able to realize that the fight that had been forced upon him was so soon and so decisively over, Jim stood gazing at the crumpled figure of his late antagonist. Just as the fear was beginning to creep into his mind that Legore had been seriously injured by striking his head against the rough trunk, the insensible man began to revive; he stirred, muttered, half rose, and then fell back. As Jim bent over to render what assistance he could, the lumberman's eyes opened and gazed at him uncomprehendingly. A moment later their blank look was replaced by such a glare of hatred that the boy straightened up and ceased his attempts to bring aid that he knew would prove unwelcome.

"Can I do anything for you?" he asked, more as a matter of form than with any idea that his offer

would be accepted.

Legore ground out an oath between his teeth. "Yes," he growled, "get out of my sight!"

Realizing the folly of any further proffers, Jim stepped back a few feet. The lumberman rose, slowly and painfully. The blood was oozing from his

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cheek, where it had scraped against the bark of the tree, and his right eye was almost closed by the puffy, bluish bruise that had been raised by the lad's fist.

For a little while he leaned unsteadily against a neighboring trunk. Then, as his head cleared and his footing became more assured, he staggered off through the pines. But before he went he cast a single look at Jim.

"Don't you worry! You'll git what's comin' to

you!" he hissed.

Soon he was hidden by the intervening forest. When he had disappeared, Jim turned and made his way slowly back toward the mill. His pulse was beating rapidly and he was conscious of the reaction from the nervous strain that he had been under; otherwise he felt no particular results from his encounter with the lumberman. Had it not been for his previous training, however, the battle would have terminated far differently.

It was not until that evening, when he was alone with his chums in their cabin, that Jim mentioned his meeting with Legore. The others listened to his story with astonishment.

"It's war from now out, and no mistake," said

Budge.

"He's been fighting us all summer," observed

Percy. "How can he do anything worse?"

"I don't see, myself, how he can; only after this he'll be in it not so much for money as for revenge. It's a personal matter with him now, and he won't

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stop at anything. We'll all have to watch out, and Jim particularly."

"Has anybody seen McAuliffe lately?" inquired

Throppy.

"I've set eyes on him two or three times at Holway & Benner's," replied Budge. "But he always tries to keep out of my way. I understand he's working again on his father's farm. It was a lucky day when we got rid of him."

"It 'd have been luckier if we'd never hired him at all," said Percy; and the others agreed with him.

It was a clear, cool Thursday night in early September. For an hour the boys discussed various matters connected with their business. Budge was to make his usual trip to Parcherville the next afternoon for money to meet the weekly pay roll; and two or three commissions were intrusted to him.

"I'm sleepy," yawned Jim at last. "Let's go to bed!"

Throppy glanced through the window. A fiery point of light drew a long trail downward from the zenith and disappeared behind the wall of pines.

"There's a shooting star!" he exclaimed. "Come

on outside and take a look at the sky!"

He stepped quickly to the door, and the others followed. As they emerged from the cabin they heard a noise in the brush behind it.

"Who's there?" demanded Budge.

No voice replied, but the noise was repeated. As Budge stepped round the corner to investigate, a

dark figure darted silently away among the trees. Young Lane felt somewhat disturbed as he rejoined

his companions.

"Somebody's been listening to our talk," he said. "Who do you suppose it was? It couldn't have been Legore, for he could never have run off so fast. If 'twas McAuliffe, he's a long way from home and he must hate us pretty bad to put himself to so much trouble. Well, whoever it is, he knows we've seen him and he won't dare to come back again to-night. But, as I've said before, we've got to watch out."

Although there was a magnificent shower of meteors, the detection of the eavesdropper killed the boys' interest in shooting stars, and they soon went back into the cabin. Further speculation as to the identity of the spy was useless, so they wasted no more time on the topic; but all felt uneasy and it was late before they dropped off to sleep.

Nothing happened in the night to rouse them, and morning found them as much at sea as before as to the name and purpose of their unknown visitor. In dismissing the matter, Jim expressed the common

opinion of all.

"Well, whoever he may have been, I can't see that

what he heard can either help him or hurt us."

After dinner Budge started on his motor cycle for Parcherville. Nothing out of the common occurred on his trip to town, and he reached the bank at about half past two. There Lawton met him, as usual, in accordance with their arrangement, made necessary

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by the institution's refusal to do business with a minor. Five hundred dollars in bills and silver was drawn by the attorney from his agent's account and turned over to Budge, who deposited the sum in a stout canvas bag with a draw-string and put it into the inside pocket of his coat.

A dark-complexioned individual in a slouch hat and a shabby black suit, who was standing close behind Lawton and his client, watched the transfer of the funds with great interest.

"Next!" said the teller.

The stranger pushed a greasy check under the grill.

"Payable to John Grabo," remarked the bank man. "Are you John Grabo?"

"Yah!"

"Well, you'll have to get somebody I know to identify you. I can't pay you ten dollars until I'm sure that this is your name."

"But I be John Grabo!"

"Yes, I hear you say so. But we can't take any chances. If you want your money, bring in some-body that I know who knows you. There's no other way for you to get that check cashed here."

The man withdrew, muttering; but Budge was aware that the keen black eyes were following him and Lawton as they crossed the street to the lawyer's

office.

The next three hours were busy ones for young Lane. Much of that time he spent with his attorney,

discussing at considerable length the sale of a certain lot of boards. Errands for himself and his friends also took longer than usual. Hence six o'clock was not far distant when he spun out of Parcherville on his motor cycle, bound for Barham.

Black clouds, rolling up in the west, foretold the approach of a heavy thunderstorm. Budge was in a hurry. He did not want to get wet. Besides, he remembered the five hundred dollars in his pocket and he did not like to be out late on a lonely road with so large a sum of money. John Grabo's slouching figure and avaricious eyes forced themselves on the boy's memory as he drove his machine forward at high speed.

Two miles out of town he struck a long stretch of sand. Spurred by the thought of the coming storm, he pushed on as fast as he could, but his progress was provokingly slow. At quarter to seven he had covered barely half the distance. Then, to add the last straw, in the middle of a patch of woods his engine

began skipping.

The sky frowned inky black and already the thunder was muttering. A few hundred yards ahead was a farmhouse, the last before a long stretch of forest and pasture extending clear to the mill road. Three courses were open to the boy: he might remain at this house until the storm blew over; he might leave his wheel there and push ahead on foot; or he might keep on, trusting that his crippled machine would at last bring him to the Peavey lot.

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During the five minutes that it took him to reach the farmhouse Budge debated as to what he had better do. The wheel decided the question for him. He shot past the homestead at a thirty-mile clip, and flew down a long hill on the wings of the wind. And just as he thought his troubles were past, his engine took to skipping worse than ever!

It was too late to turn back. Budge swallowed his disgust and limped on. Somehow and sometime he would reach the mill, although he would probably be drenched to the skin. Big drops of rain began to fall scatteringly; it would soon be black as midnight.

He had been over the road so many times that he could have followed it blindfold, which was fortunate, for his lighting equipment was out of commission.

Up a long hill; across an intervale; up another hill. The motor cycle crawled on haltingly; but still the rods slipped back behind it. Budge took heart. Ahead at the foot of this hill lay the pasture in which was the flooded quarry where the boys had taken many a swim. Only a mile farther to the mill!

A crash of thunder, a blinding flash, and down came the rain in torrents. Shutting off his power and keeping his machine under control by means of the brake, Budge felt his way carefully down the hill. Ere he reached the bottom he was soaking wet. But every yard was bringing him nearer his friends and the warm, dry cabin.

The foot at last! Budge opened the throttle and

his wheel leaped forward.

On a sudden a blaze of lightning made the landscape bright as day. Ten yards before him a strange thing happened. A rope sprang up from the mud, where it had lain flat, and stretched straight across the road at a height of about thirty inches. Budge's startled eyes instantly observed that it was tied round a spruce near the wall on the right, and that opposite on the left a man was working furiously to make the other end fast round a similar tree.

And with a curious sinking of heart he noticed that this man wore a mask!

Utter blackness again! Almost before the boy had time to think, his wheel brought up with a tremendous shock, followed closely by a resonant twang. Budge was wrenched from his seat, and hurled forward.

He alighted on his hands and knees in the mud, and slid and rolled confusedly several feet, coming to a stop in a bruised, bedraggled heap.

He lay for a moment, in the rain and pitchy gloom, too much bewildered to move, trying to collect his thoughts. Somebody had stretched the rope across the road to hold him up. Who had done it, and why? His thoughts suddenly flashed back to the canvas bag in his pocket. Ah! the five hundred dollars. That was it.

Somebody knew he had the money, and planned to rob him. John Grabo's dark face and furtive eyes, seen in the bank that afternoon, rose before him. Yet how could a stranger tell in advance what road

### HANDS UP

to take and just where to lay his ambush? No need of speculating about that now! The thing for Budge to do was to make his escape while it was dark. He started to rise.

Too late! The flash of an electric lantern illumined the gloom. A grating footstep approached. A dazzling beam struck his face.

"Hands up!" ordered a gruff, hoarse voice, evidently

disguised.

A revolver, strongly gripped by sun-browned fingers, was thrust forward into the light, its muzzle pointing straight at Budge's head. His hands went up involuntarily.

"Pass over that money!"

The command stirred Budge to desperation. It was too much to lose. Couldn't he save it in some way? He hesitated, while his brain tested and dismissed one device after another. The robber grew impatient.

"Hand it over! No fooling!"

The revolver pushed forward until it was only a few inches from the boy's head. The upper joint of the middle finger that curved round the butt was lacking. Where had he seen a hand like that? It dawned upon him in a flash with the shock of a tremendous surprise. And with the recognition came a sudden, desperate resolve that the money should not be stolen from him.

Dropping his left hand toward his pocket, as if to withdraw the canvas bag, he knocked the revolver

from the robber's hand with a quick, strong blow. A second later, aided by a glare of lightning, he shot his right fist with all his might straight into the masked face of the would-be thief.

Bang—the gun went off as it fell. The man toppled backward and his mask slipped aside, making Budge certain of the identity of his assailant. His name burst involuntarily from the boy's lips. Then all became dark again.

Budge thought quickly. He must run while he had the chance. Unarmed, he was no match for his antagonist. The latter would soon recover his pistol, and, even if his electric lamp were broken, he could follow Budge by the frequent lightning flashes. It would be unsafe for the boy to flee along the open road; far better for him to take to the fields and woods!

As the lightning blazed again he leaped the ditch on the left, crashed through a fringe of low bushes, and vaulted over the stone wall. Before him lay a rough pasture, broken by clumps of small trees. Ere he started running he cast a glance back.

The robber had sprung to his feet, and the revolver was in his hand. Even as Budge looked he fired.

Crack! The bullet whistled by the fugitive's head. Darkness once more. Bending low, the boy ran blindly with all his might. He plunged into a hollow between two knolls and went head over heels. When he regained his feet he found, to his dismay,

### HANDS UP

that his left ankle was sprained. He drove himself forward as fast as he could.

Another flash. Crack-crack! Again the bullets whistled uncomfortably close. His pursuer was hot on his heels. Smarting at having been outwitted and rendered desperate by recognition, the man would stop at nothing. Budge realized that. In his crippled condition he could no longer hope to outrun the vindictive robber. What would happen when he was overtaken?

Something of despair chilled his heart as he sprinted limpingly on through the darkness. The footsteps behind thudded louder and louder. Again the heavens blazed.

Another shot! A sharp pain seared the skin below his left armpit. The ball had grazed his side. The bandit intended to have that five hundred dollars. He was shooting to bring Budge down, dead or alive.

Heedless of the stabbing pangs in his ankle, the boy spurted. What should he do? If he snatched the bag from his pocket and flung it down, would it satisfy his pursuer? But no, he would never do that. Not so long as he could run.

As he leaped on in the darkness, his feet struck a ledge. A thrill darted through him at the touch of the rock. He knew where he was now, and a plan flashed into his head. It was his last resort; if it did not work, nothing else would. He was slowing down again and his enemy would soon be upon him; even

now he caught a muttered exclamation of triumph; the bandit was very near.

It grew bright as day. Whirling at right angles to his previous course, Budge ran along the ledge, on one side the pasture, on the other a screen of bushes. He glanced over his shoulder apprehensively, expecting another bullet; but his pursuer felt that there was no need of wasting any more lead.

"I've got you now!" he laughed; and there was a

hidden menace in his words.

The pallid blaze that illumined the landscape was dying out, when suddenly Budge came to a dead standstill. Turning sharply to the left, he parted the bushes with his hands. A deep gulf yawned before him. The robber realized his intention.

"Stop, or I'll fire!" he cried, raising his revolver.

Pitchy blackness blotted out the landscape. Only ten feet behind the boy the pistol spat flame, as he hurled himself head foremost from the brink of the bluff, down, down, down into the inky chasm!

#### XX

#### THREE OF A KIND

GRANNITT was sitting in his office at nine o'clock that Friday night, busily engaged in looking up the law applicable to a line-fence dispute between Jarvis Maloney and Sid Thrasher. The misunderstanding between the two farmers could easily have been adjusted, had the attorney been willing to use his good offices in bringing the parties together. This, however, would have meant less business for him, and consequently a smaller fee; hence his energies were devoted to skillfully, but unostentatiously, fanning the flames of discord. He had very satisfactory recollections of a similar case, where the proceedings had been drawn out to such a length, and the legal expenses had been so heavy, that the matter had culminated in a mortgage to himself, by the foreclosure of which he had acquired an extremely desirable piece of property. It was not too much to hope that the present difficulty might result in the same way; therefore his interest in the case was keen.

Round the rickety building the storm raged furiously. Incessant thunderclaps shook the air; now and then a jagged lightning flash ripped the

pitchy gloom wide open; and all the while the rain descended in torrents. Even the dingy, dimly lighted office seemed a haven of peace and comfort, when compared with the tempest that rioted outside. Save for the electric flashes, Barham Four Corners was shrouded in blackness. There were no street lamps, and the people went to bed early; the few feeble rays that struggled from widely scattered windows served only to make the surrounding darkness doubly dismal.

A heavy step sounded on the platform before Grannitt's office. The attorney pricked up his ears. A client? Surely it must be a matter of pressing importance that would drive a man out in such a

storm to seek legal advice.

Clumsy feet stumbled up the creaking stairs and along the unlighted hall. The door flew open without any preliminary knock and Legore's square,

bulky figure entered the room.

The lumberman's face was partly concealed by his dripping felt hat. When he removed it, as he strode toward Grannitt's table, the attorney gave an exclamation of surprise at the sight of his client's bruised, swollen features.

"Where did you get that black eye, Ches?" he demanded. "You look as if a bolt of lightning had hit you."

Legore resented the other's attempt at facetiousness.

"If what hit me had hit you," he growled, "you wouldn't think 'twas so funny. I had a run-in this

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mornin' with that black-haired feller who belongs to Lane's gang. Met him down on the lot I just bought of Zack Brewster. He handed me out some second-hand talk an' I lit into him. If he'd fought square I could hev licked him easy; but he used a dirty trick an' downed me. Threw me clean over his head an' nigh broke my neck against a tree trunk."

Grannitt stared at the other in genuine amazement. The ugly look on Legore's face convinced the attorney

that Hard Cash was not joking.

"Threw you over his head? How in the world could a boy do that with such a heavy man as you?"

The lumberman's scowl foreboded no good to Jim.

"I don't know how; but I know he did it. Guess 'twas one o' those fancy wrasseling stunts they teach at college along with a lot of other useless trash. But I'll fix him! He'll be sorry he ever tried such a game on H. C. Legore."

"What do you want to do, Ches? Swear out a

complaint against him for assault and battery?"

"Not on your life! This thing's too personal to go to law about. It's jest a little private tiff 'twixt him an' me; an' when it's settled it's goin' to be settled right!"

The attorney suddenly lifted his head, listening like a wolf. Steps, stealthy but unmistakable, sounded on the platform outside. Somebody ascended the

stairs quietly, and tiptoed along the hall.

"Guess this is likely to be my busy night," remarked Grannitt.

He and the lumberman turned their faces toward the door. It was pushed open without any preliminary knock, and a man entered. His clothing was water soaked and stained with mud; his lean, sallow face was marked with anxious lines; but his eyes shone hard and bright.

Grannitt eyed the newcomer with suspicion, but Legore accosted him familiarly, though with some

surprise.

"Lookin' for me?" he queried. "What's the trouble? Anything special happened at the Peavey lot?"

The man dropped, uninvited, into a chair, and coolly crossed one leg over the other. Little runnels

trickled from his wet clothing along the floor.

"Yes—and no," he answered. "I'm looking for you; but, so far as I know, nothing particular's happened at the Peavey lot. At least, not right on the lot, though something's taken place perhaps a mile from it that you might be interested to hear about. But that can wait. I've come in for a settlement. I'm leaving town to-night; and I want you to help me get out."

Legore's features expressed both wonder and dis-

pleasure.

"But I want ye to stop," he remonstrated. "You agreed to stay as long as the mill was runnin'. I can't allow ye to go off now an' leave me in the lurch."

His face was beginning to grow red. There was

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the suspicion of a sneer on the other's stolid countenance.

"Sorry you can't allow me to go; but I'm going, and that's all there is to it. I've a pressing engagement fifty miles west of here, and it's up to you to see that I get there not long after daybreak. But first we'll have to square up."

The lumberman purpled and his voice grew louder.

"I don't know what crazy notion's got into your head to start ye off like this; but if you go you won't get a dollar more out o' me; an' as for my furnishin' ye transportation, that's too foolish to talk about."

"Oh, it is, is it? Perhaps it won't seem so foolish to

you when you hear what's happened to-night."

Grannitt had been looking sharply from one speaker to the other, trying to catch the drift of their conversation. Now he took a hand.

"As your friend has seen fit to come to my office for an interview with you, Chesley, might it not be well for me to know what the difference is between you? Perhaps I can suggest a way to settle it."

The stranger treated his proffer with scant cere-

mony.

"This matter's going to be settled without calling in any pettifogger. And there'll be no dickering. He's coming up to the dough dish, and 'll do just what I want."

The reference to pettifogging pricked the attorney's dignity.

"See here, my man," he said, sharply, "you're

welcome to come in here to talk with Mr. Legore, but you've got no call to insult me. So long as you're in this room keep a civil tongue in your head!"

The other sneered.

"Grannitt," he said, "that high and mighty stuff doesn't go down with me. I don't know whether you know or not who I am and what I'm in Barham for, but I've heard a lot about you and I feel as much acquainted with you as if I'd known you all my life. We might as well talk plain. Legore here may or may not have told you that he got me to come to town and to hire out with those boys to make 'em all the trouble I could. Now then, Hard Cash, haven't I lived up to my part of the contract? Remember those spikes in the logs, and the cut belts, and all the little fires in the woods, and Ireson's horse, and that moose-head, and on top of everything else the big fire that burned the mill! Remember how I've kept you posted about all that happened on the Peavey lot! Got any fault to find with me?"

"Not a mite, not a mite!" replied Legore, with a sidelong glance at the amazed attorney, who had been struck silent by the stranger's words. "You've done the job up brown. That's why I don't want ye to

leave me now in the pinch of the game."

"Well, whether you want me to or not, I'm going," was the short reply. "This place won't be healthy for me any longer. I might as well tell you why. I've felt for some time that young Lane was bringing out too much ready cash from Parcherville on Fri-

### THREE OF A KIND

days, so to-night I held him up at the foot of Gladden's Hill to relieve him of the pay roll!"

"What's that!" shouted both his listeners at once,

glaring at him in consternation.

The lumberman's red face actually paled. Grannitt leaned forward, gripping the table edge, moistening his lips with his tongue, his leathery cheeks ashen. Only the stranger preserved his calmness.

"Why, that's highway robbery, man!" exclaimed

the dismayed attorney.

"Of course I know it," returned the other, indifferently. "I'm not quite a fool. But you don't suppose I'd waste my time down here for the beggarly amount Legore's promised to pay me, do you? I've had my eye on two or three soft things on the side, such as the safes in Holway & Benner's and the other stores; but Lane's pay roll seemed to be the easiest proposition in sight."

The storm howled outside; the rain whipped against the windows; over the room brooded a thick,

oppressive silence. Legore broke it.

"Well," he forced himself to say, "of course I'd never hire you to do such a thing, an' you know it. That's your own hunt. But seein's you've gone ahead an' kicked the bucket over, I guess we'd better settle up."

Pulling his wallet from his pocket, he counted out

a bunch of bills.

"Here's your hundred dollars! Now we're square."

The other verified the sum, then thrust the roll inside his coat.

"Correct! Now how about helping me out of town?"

The blood again suffused the lumberman's face. His voice rose.

"That's your lookout! I won't lift a finger to help.
After what you've gone an' done, I wash my hands

of ye?"

"No need to wake up everybody at the Corners. But he's right, my friend. If you hadn't told us you'd committed a robbery we could have aided you; now if we assisted you knowingly we'd be liable under the law. So you see it wouldn't be safe."

The man laughed mirthlessly.

"Safe!" he jeered. "After you hear all I've got to say, I guess you'll realize it 'll be a blamed sight safer for you to help me than not to help me. But first let's come to an understanding right now about one thing! Don't insult me again addressing me as your friend. Save your lying for your clients. I've been called a good many hard names, and swallowed 'em; but that's one I won't stand for. I'm no friend of yours, or of his, either. Now, Hard Cash, you needn't think you can shunt me off so easy, after using me as a cat's-paw. You'll find I don't need any guardian; so far, I've always been able to look out for myself without the help of any small-town baron like you. You needn't swell up and turn

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purple; I'm not afraid of your bellowing. I've been up against a good many men who could swallow you whole, without loosening their belts. As for you'— he swung toward Grannitt and spat contemptuously on the dusty floor—"you're not the first shyster lawyer I've twisted round my little finger!"

The pair gazed on him, tongue tied, dread in their

eyes.

"Now," he continued, as his voice hardened and a hollow note crept into it, "I'll tell you what we're all three up against. I didn't get that money of young Lane. He knocked me down, jumped over the wall, and started running through the pasture. I chased him and there were some shots fired. He went head first into that flooded limerock quarry, and I couldn't find him. That's about all."

"Good God!" exclaimed Milo, aghast, his horrified face paling. "You don't mean to say the boy's

drowned!"

"No, I don't mean to say he's drowned, and I don't mean to say he isn't. He went down. I waited half an hour and he didn't come up. I searched round the whole quarry with my light, but I couldn't find a trace of him. He may have hit his head on a rock, and I don't care much if he did. If he's dead he can't tell anything; if he's alive there'll be the deuce to pay, for he recognized me,"

He stopped. Both Legore and Grannitt were too

much stunned to offer any comments.

"So that's why I'm leaving Barham to-night,"

resumed the speaker. "What's done is done, and there's no help for it. And if there's trouble for me there'll be trouble for you."

Still his hearers said nothing.

"Why do you care so much for that boy all of a sudden?" asked the man, impatiently. "I shouldn't think two land sharks like you'd be so chickenhearted."

"I'm not thinking so much of the boy as I am of ourselves," returned the lawyer. "If he's drowned, where do we get off?"

"Just about where I do if I'm caught," observed the other, composedly. "That's why it 'll pay you good dividends to have me safe across two state lines at the earliest possible minute."

Legore was beginning to recover his self-possession.

"Why do you keep pretendin' we're mixed up with you in this scrape?" he blustered. "We didn't hev anything to do with robbin' an' drownin' the boy!"

Grannitt clutched at the straw of hope held out by his friend.

"That's so, Ches!" he approved. "There's no right or justice in dragging us into a thing we had no part in."

The man was frankly disgusted.

"Right! Justice! Don't make me laugh, Grannitt! You forgot the meaning of those words years ago, even if you ever knew it. You talk like a pair of three-year-olds! But I guess I can hammer an idea

### THREE OF A KIND

or two into your skulls if they're not too thick. Legore, everybody in Barham knows you've had it in for those boys ever since they came to town; you've talked too loud and too much. As for you," he whirled on Grannitt, "the whole county knows what a Judas you are. You'd sell out your best friend (if you had one) for money. Now suppose I'm caught and have to stand trial. My testimony wouldn't listen well in court. Perhaps it 'd be easy for you to explain how I happened to get on such confidential terms with you as to tell you about this robbery; perhaps it wouldn't. The whole business at the Peavey lot 'd have to come out. I've a good imagination and I'd have plenty of time to use it before the trial. It wouldn't hurt me any, and wouldn't trouble my conscience, to confess a lot of things that weren't so, if only I pulled in the pair of you. And I shouldn't hire you to defend me, Grannitt. Oh no! I'd engage a real lawyer, young Lawton, for instance. Now you see why you'd better get me out of town to-night, and across to Augusta in time for the early train. It's only about fifty miles, and a good auto and driver can make it easy. After I'm safe away you can cook up any kind of a story you please, to save your own skins."

The lawyer had followed this somewhat lengthy monologue with close attention. At its close he

threw up the sponge.

"He's right, Ches! He's got us! And we might as well make the best of it. I'll call Buzzell's garage at

Parcherville, and have them send out an auto right away."

He turned to his telephone. The robber stopped

him.

"Fine, Grannitt! You can see through a millstone if the hole's big enough, and that's how I tried to make it. But wait a minute! There's another little matter of business to be attended to first. I need five hundred dollars. I didn't pick it off young Lane, so I'll have to get it from you. And I want it quick!"

This was too much. Legore and the lawyer sprang to their feet, but they looked into the steady muzzle of an automatic, with a blue eye behind it,

cold and hard as ice.

"No fooling! Sit down! I might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. No use squirming or squealing! I want five hundred in cash, and you're going to get it for me, Grannitt, before I leave this office. If you two haven't that amount with you, somebody can go out after it. I'm sure there's that much in the place. I don't care what lies you tell, or how or where you get it-only get it! And be lively! I'm in a hurry to start off!"

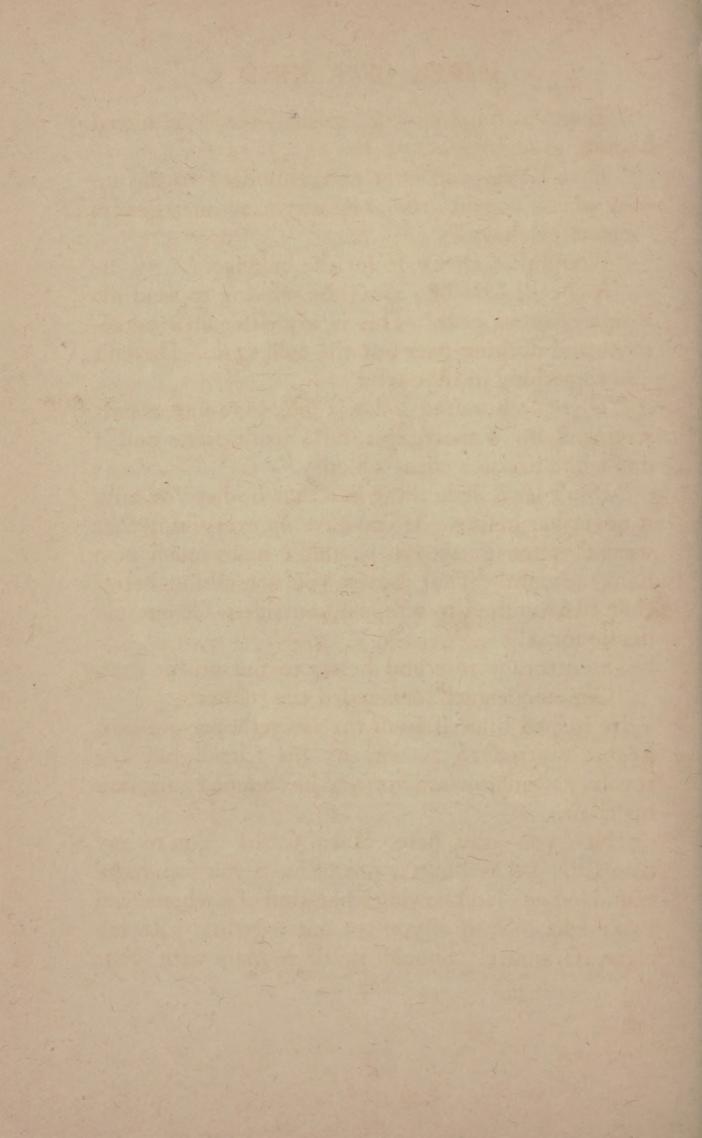
Lumberman and lawyer looked helplessly at each other, and each read defeat in the other's eyes. The round, black muzzle of the steady revolver admitted of no argument. Grannitt took the count.

"I've less than fifty dollars here. How much

have you, Ches?"



"I WANT FIVE HUNDRED IN CASH, AND YOU'RE GOING TO GET IT FOR ME, GRANNITT, BEFORE I LEAVE THIS OFFICE"



### THREE OF A KIND

"'Bout a hundred an' twenty-five," admitted

Legore, grudgingly.

"That leaves you over three hundred to dig up somewhere," said the highwayman, mercilessly. "Better get busy!"

"Wouldn't a check do for the balance?"

"A check! Bosh! You'll be offering to send me a money order next. This is a gentleman's agreement and nothing goes but the cold cash. Haven't you something in that safe?"

"There's a hundred dollars I took in to-day as part payment on a mortgage; but 'tisn't mine and I

don't like to use a client's money."

"Don't let a little thing like that bother you any; it never has before. If you gave up everything that wasn't yours, guess you wouldn't have much of a bank account. That leaves you something better than two hundred to scrape up outside. Go out and hustle for it!"

The attorney rose and began to put on his coat.

"Gimme a cigar!" demanded the robber.

He helped himself from the lawyer's private box. Legore started to accompany his friend, but the revolver swung toward him and he slumped back into his chair.

"No—you stay here, Hard Cash! You're my security. I'll feel better not to have you wanderin' round loose. No knowing what kind of a scheme you two might cook up if you got out together. Rotten cigar, Grannitt! Should think a man with your

money 'd smoke something better. Perhaps these are the kind you save for your friends. Now listen, you two! And this holds till we part company. There are six good reasons in this pistol why I'll never be arrested. There's one for each of you, if you need it. Better play fair!"

The lawyer went out with a white face. During the half hour which Legore and his jailer spent alone neither spoke a word. But the latter had begun to show ill-concealed signs of restlessness when Grannitt returned.

"Got the money?" demanded the bandit impatiently.

"Yes."

"Then bunch all the stuff together and count it out on the table where I can see it. Don't let it run short, or you'll have to go out again."

The five hundred made a very respectable roll; covering his prisoners with his revolver, the man stuffed the bills into his pocket.

"Now," he said to Grannitt, "call that auto just as quick as you can raise Central!"

### XXI

#### HARE AND HOUNDS

WHEN Budge threw himself headlong into the pitchy gloom that brooded over the flooded quarry, he was not merely obeying the instinct of self-preservation that impelled him to escape at any cost from the pursuing thug with the revolver; a definite plan had flashed into his brain. Twenty feet below the brink he struck the water with a mighty splash. As he went under, a burning twinge in his right shoulder told that the last bullet had found its mark. It did not prevent him from paddling vigorously, however, and his head soon emerged above the surface.

He trod water, waiting for the next lightning flash. It came and went, but not too quickly for him to get his bearings. Previous swimming trips had familiarized him with the place. His eye caught a familiar ledge, and he struck out for it through the blackness. The pattering rain drowned the noise of his strokes. He swam as fast as he could, for he realized that he must get under cover quickly; the robber would soon be looking for him with his flashlight.

His fingers brushed the ledge at the very instant

that a shimmering beam shot from the bushes on the brink and played over the abandoned pit. Taking a long breath, Budge ducked under. A moment later he came up beneath the overarching roof of rock that Percy had discovered on their first swim in the quarry.

There he clung in the darkness, waiting. His pursuer would probably make a thorough investigation of the walls and surface before abandoning his search. Two or three minutes passed. Suddenly there was a footstep on the ledge directly over Budge's head; a silvery blur in the black water beside him. The rob-

ber was standing not a foot above.

Budge grew tense. Had the man seen him before he gained his refuge? The seconds passed slowly. Then the gleam vanished and there was no further tremor in the rock. Minute after minute dragged by with leaden pace. Still Budge waited. Too much was at stake for him to leave his hiding-place too soon. He had no means of determining time, but he felt sure that a full hour must have elapsed ere, chilled to the bone, he drew himself out upon the rock.

The storm was still raging. Climbing a few feet and then stopping, eyes and ears on the alert, painfully conscious of his wounded shoulder and his sprained ankle, Budge ascended the narrow path that led up the quarry wall. At its summit he hesitated, not daring to forsake the pit that had sheltered him until repeated lightning flashes had convinced him that

### HARE AND HOUNDS

the pasture was empty and that the robber had abandoned his pursuit.

It was not far from nine o'clock when, fagged and tempest-beaten, he stumbled into the cabin where

his three chums sat waiting anxiously.

His story was soon told. A quick examination by Jim proved that the bullet had only furrowed his shoulder and that his ankle was but slightly sprained. A council was held immediately. At its close Jim made a call at another cabin.

"Gone!" he reported on his return. "And taken all his stuff with him. Looks as if he didn't intend to come back. What shall we do?"

Warmth and rest were fast making Budge feel quite like himself and he was growing angrier every minute.

"Do?" he almost shouted. "Swear out a warrant and have him arrested to-night, if we can find him! Whatever's done will have to be done right off. He won't hang round Barham a minute longer than he can help. Come on, Jim! Let's go up to Kimball's and 'phone Mr. Lawton! I want Cal Buncy out here just as quick as gas can bring him."

"But your shoulder and ankle-"

"What's a shoulder and ankle compared with smoking out a nest of crooks! I've a feeling that this whole thing's going to come to a head to-night, and I'd like to help it along with both hands."

Lawton was called on the telephone and matters were speedily arranged. Jim and Budge returned to

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camp to await impatiently the arrival of the deputy. The rain had ceased, but the sky was still black with clouds.

It was after half past ten when the boys heard a shouting in the direction of the county road. Jim flung open the cabin door, shedding a flood of light over the clearing, just as a man hurried past the boiler. It was Cal Buncy, panting, draggled, and mud-bespattered.

"Got here as quick as I could, boys," he gasped, staggering inside and dropping into a chair to re-

cover his breath.

"Where's your auto?" asked Budge.

"Back at the foot of Gladden's Hill with both eyes put out. I've run all the rest of the way. I'm afraid that bird you're after 'll fly the coop before we can catch him."

"How's that?"

The deputy explained.

"Mr. Lawton got out a warrant for his arrest, an' had a Ford from Buzzell's call to bring me out here. The driver told me that another car had left the garage for Barham about fifteen minutes before he did; said that Milo Grannitt had telephoned from the Four Corners that somebody there wanted to be taken over to Augusta to-night. I smelled a rat right away an' told my man to hit the high places. He did—some of 'em. About six miles along we came on the other fellow, hauled up to change tires. I was never so pleased in my life. We left him behind,

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swearin' till the air was blue, an' plowed an' skated an' skidded along, till we got over Gladden's Hill. At its foot we ran onto a motor cycle, an' a second later hit a rope some kind friend had stretched across the road. We broke through it, but it put both our lamps out of commission. A car without lights to-night might as well be in the garage, so I left it an' pushed on afoot. Pretty soon the other fellow came tearin' by; he'd fixed his tire an' was tryin' to make up time. I jumped, an' he went past like a ten-inch shell. By now he's probably got his passenger an' is kitin' along toward Augusta."

The boys looked at one another helplessly. If the lights of the other car were smashed, it could not follow the fugitive across country on a night like that. Tears of unavailing rage stood in Budge's eyes.

"What's the matter with using our own Ford?"

asked Percy.

"What, that old rattletrap! It 'd fall to pieces

before we'd gone ten miles!"

"I've been all over it," said Percy, "and I'll guarantee it 'll last longer than that. There's plenty of gas and water aboard and it's all ready to start."

A gleam of hope lighted the sheriff's face.

"Can you drive, young fellow?" he inquired.

"I could once," returned Percy, diffidently.

"But I mean, can you drive fast?"

"I have done such a thing," admitted Percy.

"Well, I want you to drive faster than you have ever driven before—as fast as you can."

Percy's eyes glittered.

"Do you mean it?" he asked.

"Sure!"

"All right! Come on!"

They went outside to where the Ford stood between two cabins. Percy lighted the lamp, and cranked the car.

"Climb aboard!"

"O Lord!" groaned Lane. "P. Whittington at the helm and given carte blanche! And I haven't made my will yet!"

But he climbed into the rear seat with Jim. Throppy was to remain behind. Buncy took his

place beside the driver.

"There's just about one more good ride in this pile of junk, and this is going to be that one," said Percy. "All ashore that's going ashore!"

The Ford leaped from between the cabins.

"I've been on the wrong side against you fellows every time before," said the deputy. "This time I'm glad to be in right. We'll get him!"

The machine darted out through the wood road.

An hour had passed since Grannitt had telephoned the Parcherville garage, and still the ordered car had not arrived. The three sitting glum and silent in the lawyer's office could not understand the delay. The robber, eyeing his companions suspiciously, fingered his automatic and muttered an occasional oath between his set teeth.

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Finally the blast of a horn, the shimmer of lights, and a machine came to a stop beside the platform under the window. With a menacing glance at the others, the bandit laid his finger on his lips.

"Remember!"

He stood up.

"Put on your coats! You're going with me. I don't know what you might do by telephone if I left you behind."

A gesture with the revolver silenced protestation.

"You go ahead of me, Hard Cash!" he ordered.
"Grannitt, put out your light and come behind!
You do the talking!"

The three creaked and stumbled their way down to the platform. Grannitt, obeying a jab with the pocketed revolver, cut short the driver's explanations and apologies.

"We want you to take us over to Augusta. Drive

as fast as you can."

Down the Parcherville road appeared a light; there was a distant sound suggestive of spring cleaning in a hardware store. Another car was coming, and at high speed. The robber understood, and immediately assumed active charge of the proceedings.

"Take that front seat, Grannitt!" he ordered.

"Jump in behind him, Legore! Quick!"

The two obeyed. Their captor sprang in beside the lumberman.

"Now give her the limit!"

Though the driver was evidently somewhat sur-

prised at the abruptness of the commands, he followed them to the letter. The machine leaped forward up the rough, muddy road.

As the party in the Ford rattled and jolted into the Four Corners, they saw a red glimmer in front of Grannitt's office. Buncy gave an exclamation of satisfaction.

"There's the car now! We've got him!"

A moment later, as the light flitted away, he uttered a sharp cry of disappointment.

"He's started! Can't you hit it up a little faster?"

"I'll try," responded Percy.

The boy was putting forth all the skill and daring he could muster in his effort to extort the last scrap of speed from his crazy vehicle. The Ford jumped and bounced and shot from one side of the road to the other. The loose steering-gear flung him this way and that and shook him till his teeth rattled; but still he clung to the wheel.

The road grew worse; it was full of turns and twists; mud-holes succeeded rocks, and rocks succeeded mud-holes. Percy hung to his quarry like a hound on the trail of a rabbit. He held his own, and did well to do it; though he could not gain, still he did not lose. Buncy knew the road like a book; and his advice time and again saved the boy from disaster.

"Better hold up a bit here; bad place in front. Slow now; ugly corner ahead. Mind that curve or

### HARE AND HOUNDS

you'll go into the ditch! Straight and level now; open her wide!"

So they tore on, up hill and down, over the midnight country. The other driver knew the road, too. Thus far the race was a tie; a loose nut, a broken spring, a blow-out, a punctured tire might decide it. Given a straight, level course, the car in front would soon have outdistanced the other; but, thanks to Buncy's coaching and Percy's daring, almost reckless, driving, the Ford stuck like a leech.

From his seat behind the driver the robber cast frequent glances backward; he did not relish the tenacity with which the pursuing machine held its own.

"Can't you shake that fellow?" shouted he into the ear of the man at the wheel.

"I'm doing my best!" the other hallooed back. "Tisn't safe to go any faster! I'm liable to ditch her if I do! Whoever's driving that old junk-shop's got nerve. I wouldn't dare take the chance he's running!"

"Can you turn off your rear light?"

"Yes; but I wouldn't want to; it'd be against the law."

"Hang the law! Turn it off! That 'll make it harder for him to follow us."

The man hesitated. Something cold and round was jammed suddenly against the back of his head.

"I'm running this car and you're taking your orders from me! Turn it off!"

The terrified driver promptly pressed a button. Thereafter he obeyed orders without questioning them.

Apparently the extinguishing of their rear lamp did not bother their pursuer, for the dancing headlights behind glowed as brightly as ever. They struck a particularly bad stretch of road and the Ford began actually to gain, rod by rod. The bandit noticed it immediately.

"Guess it's about time for me to teach that fellow

a lesson," he remarked.

Leaning out from the side of the car, he began firing back. As shot after shot rang out, Legore and Grannitt sat shivering. At last the lawyer could restrain himself no longer.

"Stop her, driver!" he shouted.

The smoking muzzle was pushed suddenly into his face.

"Shut up! If he does there's a bullet in this for each of you!"

Grannitt subsided in a cold sweat. Legore, hunched up in his corner of the rear seat, shook in palsied silence.

Bullet after bullet whistled round the rocking Ford. Suddenly a ball shattered the glass windshield and its fragments flew about the car.

"Anybody hurt?" shouted the deputy.

#### HARE AND HOUNDS

"Face cut a little! That's all!" responded Budge. Percy still held gamely to his course, and they

gained steadily. Two other shots went wild.

"You've got the real stuff," observed Buncy, admiration in his voice. "Well, I can't drive a car, but I can do something else; an' I guess it's about time I did it. This thing is altogether too one-sided. I didn't live ten years in the West for nothin'."

Drawing his revolver and bracing himself, he leaned round the end of the ruined wind-shield and rested the weapon on his left arm, stiff as an iron bar. A sharp turn compelled the car in front to slow down and expose its broadside to them. Sighting quickly, Buncy pulled the trigger.

Bang-bang-bang-bang!

A dull report came back. The pursued machine lurched drunkenly.

"There goes his right front tire!" yelled Percy.

"That's the one I aimed at," said the sheriff. "I'll get the other at the next turn the opposite way. It's close ahead!"

"No! No!" cried Percy. "Don't shoot again!"

"Why not? I can hit it."

"I don't doubt that; but they'll have harder going, if only one is flat."

"How do you know?"

"I've tried it-both ways."

Buncy desisted. Slowly but surely they crept up on their quarry. All at once on an abrupt curve the crippled machine swerved sharply, plunged into the

ditch, plowed along for two or three rods, and came to a dead stop.

The race was over!

The Ford halted beside its beaten rival. The robber, cursing, was wildly hunting on the floor of the car for the spare cartridges he had dropped. Buncy covered him.

"Throw out your gun!" he warned. "If you don't, my next shot 'll hit something thicker and more solid than rubber."

Sullenly the man obeyed. As the deputy scanned the interior of the machine, his voice told his surprise.

"What! Two more passengers aboard? Tumble out, gentlemen, so that we can see who you are."

The four lined up in the glare of the Ford's headlights, the driver with alacrity, the other three

reluctantly. Buncy called the roll.

"Bert Grafton! You couldn't help drivin' that car as you were told to do; you can step one side. Who's next? Mr. Grannitt! And Mr. Chesley Legore! Gentlemen, I'm surprised to find you in such bad company. And here's the man I've got the warrant for—Rodney Graff!"

#### XXII

#### HALF A MILLION FEET

RAFF, millman, spy, and would-be robber, cast an uncertain glance around, as if meditating flight. But the deputy's ready revolver swung up and checkmated him.

"Feel in my right-hand pocket, Lane," directed the officer, "and see what you can find!"

Budge drew out a pair of handcuffs.

"Now snap 'em on him!"

A moment later Graff's wrists were securely manacled. Buncy drew a long breath.

"That makes me feel a sight easier. He's a bad

egg!"

Budge could not help reproaching his former em-

ployee.

"I'm sorry, Graff," said he. "I liked you and we've always tried to use you white. What made you do it?"

The man's sullen face hardened, but he vouchsafed no reply. The sheriff's seriousness changed to jocularity. He extended his hand to Percy.

"Much obliged, young fellow!" Whittington returned his grip.

"Don't mention it! What for?"

"For lettin' me out alive. I've done some fast ridin' in my day, but I've never perforated the atmosphere at such a rate as I've traveled to-night. Especially in a car like that!"

Percy almost blushed at the compliment.

"Thank you," he replied modestly.

"He can put it all over you drivin', Bert," continued the deputy.

Grafton had been looking at the Ford.

"I'll say you're right," he answered. "I take off my hat to him."

While Buncy stood guard over his prisoner, the boys aided the Parcherville driver in extricating his machine from the ditch. Fortunately it was uninjured. Turning the cars around proved to be somewhat difficult; but at last it was accomplished, and the party started back for Barham, the garage auto ahead. Legore occupied the front seat with Grafton; while the deputy and his handcuffed captive sat behind. In the Ford Grannitt rode beside Percy; and Budge and Jim took again the places they had had during the chase. The return trip consumed a long time, and it was not until the small hours of the morning that the two cars rolled into the Four Corners.

During the ride Buncy had been considering what attitude he should take toward Legore and Grannitt.

"I don't know as I've any authority to do or say anything to you two," he said. "But the fact of

your being on the same car with a criminal fleein'

from arrest doesn't look any too good to me."

"We couldn't help ourselves," protested the lawyer. "He made us come at the point of his revolver."

The sheriff rubbed his forehead.

"The thing's beyond me to unsnarl," he confessed.
"I don't see as I can stop you from goin' home; but
the law may have something to say to you later."

For the first time since his arrest the prisoner

opened his lips.

"You're just right on that point," he remarked, significantly.

Lumberman and attorney vanished in the dark-

ness. Buncy yawned.

"Now for Parcherville!" said he.

"Don't you want one of us to go with you?" asked Jim.

The deputy laughed.

"No, thanks! Guess I can land our friend safe in jail without gettin' into any muss. He isn't the first crook I've ridden with. Let her go, Bert!"

The machine whirled off; the Ford followed more slowly. The boys turned in at the mill road and soon reached their cabin. After giving Throppy a brief account of their ride they went to sleep.

The next morning they were at their tasks as usual.

College was to begin the 25th of the month, hence the plant had only two weeks more to run. The boys threw themselves into their duties with

renewed zeal. Jim took Graff's place and everything went swimmingly. It was easy to work through the clear, cool, pleasant days, and they made long hours.

Merrithew came over one forenoon with a letter; he seemed deeply affected. He went straight to

Percy.

"I've just received this from your father," he said. "You must have thought that I acted strangely a few weeks back, when I refused to meet him. Now I'll tell you why. A good many years ago I invested about five thousand dollars, all I had, in a small railroad that was backed by him. The bottom dropped out and the stock became worthless. That was one of the things that drove me from the town where I was living off here into the woods. I laid the blame on him, thinking that he had deliberately swindled the stockholders. I didn't know that he had suffered with the others and that he had determined to make good their losses as soon as he was able. When that time came he had lost track of me, and he would never have found me if you boys hadn't taken hold of this mill. So you see I've another reason for being obliged to you. He's sent me this check for the original sum with full interest to date."

Percy's eyes dwelt on the strong signature, scrawled at the bottom of the blue slip that the hermit displayed.

"That old fist looks good to me," he said. "Some

people call J. P. a hard man. He may be, sometimes; but he's a square one. I ought to know."

"I'm sure you're right," replied Merrithew. "Later I hope to see him and thank him personally."

"You'll probably have the chance," said Percy. "We're not going to let you forget us after we go away."

Henry Ireson approached Budge that noon.

"I've got some news for you. Legore and Grannitt have both left town!"

"Where have they gone?"

"Don't know that, or when they're coming back, if they ever come at all! If they don't, Barham 'll never miss'em. Guess they're afraid to wait here until Graff has his trial. Understand that Milo's going to be disbarred, anyway, so he won't be able to practice in this state again."

That night the boys tramped out to the old quarry for a final swim, and Budge went over the hold-up once more for their benefit. He had already recovered his motor cycle, which was little the worse

for its collision with the rope.

The next day was Friday; and that night the plant was to be shut down and the men paid off. In the afternoon Lane made his last trip to Parcherville and he and Lawton closed the account at the bank.

"I won't say good-by," remarked the lawyer. "Graff's trial is set for this term and you boys 'll have to be here as witnesses. So we'll see each other again."

Budge returned to Barham earlier than usual. As he entered the Peavey lot a long, shrill whistle announced that the day's work was over and that the season had ended.

The men were paid off at once. Those who lived near went home; the others remained overnight in their cabins. Saturday was spent in dismantling the mill and putting it into such condition that the party who next took hold of it would find it in good shape. Budge sold his motor cycle to young Tug Prince, giving the boy a good trade.

An unexpected visitor in the forenoon was Gordon McAuliffe. He broached the purpose of his call

without delay.

"I knew you suspected me of making most of the trouble you've had about this plant; and I don't blame you for thinking so, for I was pretty disagreeable a good part of the time. But I've never done you a cent's worth of damage, and I wouldn't want you to go away feeling that I had. I knew what you fellows were up against with Ches Legore. I'd had my quarrels with him; and he didn't like me any better than he liked you. You did right to discharge me. I was in earnest in offering to go on Whittington's bond and it hurt my feelings some when you wouldn't have me. But I don't wonder that you thought I was trying to put up some game on you."

"McAuliffe," returned Budge, "I'll be honest and say that I didn't like you and that I thought you

were at the bottom of most of our troubles. I know you're telling the truth. We'll let bygones be bygones."

They shook hands.

Sunday was a day of rest on the Peavey lot. On Monday morning Briggs and Doggett started for New Hampshire, where they had a three months' job in another portable mill. By noon nothing remained to be done about the plant, and the boys were in the mood for a final outing.

"Let's take a row in Jim's boat," proposed Percy. They spent a pleasant two hours, paddling and drifting on the blue waters of Lake Agawam. On coming ashore they all went up to the farmhouse to present the boat to Joshua Kimball and to thank his wife for the baked beans and doughnuts they had enjoyed so much during the summer. When supper was over that evening, and the dishes had been washed and put away, a council was held to listen to Budge's report of the results of their three months' work.

"No need of going into details," said Lane. "You know 'em as well as I do. But here's the total! In round numbers, half a million feet; in round figures, five thousand dollars clean profit! That means twelve hundred and fifty apiece, after all bills have been paid. Not so bad for thirteen weeks! It 'd have been considerably more if Legore had let us alone; but we haven't much reason to kick."

The other three were of the same opinion.

"You've been as good as your word, and better, Budge," declared Jim. "I'm mighty glad we came, not only for what we've earned to help us along in our college course, but for what the summer has meant to Throppy. That's better than everything else."

"Let's send for Mr. Merrithew," proposed Percy, "and wind up with a rousing good time."

The hermit, summoned by Throppy, came over

gladly.

"I don't know what I'll do when you boys are gone," he said. "I'm afraid you've spoiled me for living out here alone. Guess I'll have to move up into the village, or maybe travel about a little."

"If you do, you must come to see us at Warburton," said Jim. "We'll put you up for as long as

you may care to stay."

They sat late, singing and telling stories, and when the party broke up they all walked back with Merrithew to his cabin. The stars were sharply brilliant in a dark blue sky, and a cool breeze was soughing through the pines. Never had the dim, fragrant woods seemed more peaceful and beautiful.

The next morning dawned clear and bracing. The boys were astir early, preparing for their departure: Merrithew came over to assist them. Their baggage was brought out and loaded into the Ford, and amid a chorus of good-bys they jolted out of the clearing for the last time. As they went their eyes dwelt on the silent mill with its black boiler and

machinery and smokeless stack; the high, yellow sawdust pile; the broad slopes, rough with stumps; the smutted stretch reaching down to the sapphire lake; and the little cabins, with the hermit before them waving his farewells.

A turn in the road and the picture disappeared. They whirled out through the sticking-ground, between piles of boards still unhauled, and soon were speeding down the county road. At Holway & Benner's they turned the old Ford over to Henry Ireson, to whom it had been sold. As they helped Zenas Strout load their baggage on the Edginton stage they looked across the street to the closed office of Milo Grannitt, departed with his client, Hard Cash Legore, for fields unknown.

Zenas cracked his whip and spoke to his horses; the stage started. Soon Barham Four Corners lay behind them. On the summit of the hill that commanded a prospect of the basin the driver reined in his team.

"Take a last look," he invited.

The boys did. They saw the broad hollow rimmed with wooded hills; the scattered farms with their white houses; the village and its spires; Mount Nebo; Lake Agawam; and the devastated waste of the Peavey lot. They gazed long.

"Seen enough?" asked Zenas.

They nodded, and again the stage rolled on. The boys' thoughts and conversation turned toward the future. Three more years of college lay before them,

and then the broader field of life. But, whatever the struggles in which they might engage thereafter, the three months they had just passed would never be forgotten; for they had been down, but not out; they had met with reverses, but they had never acknowledged defeat; they had fought a hard fight clean through to the finish, and had won.

THE END



